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Cultural Studies and the Field of ‘Spanish’ in the US Academy

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Introduction

It is evident from a casual browse through the last ten years of *Profession*, the Modern Language Association (MLA)’s “journal of opinion about and for the modern language profession” in the United States, that the field of “foreign languages” has been undergoing some radical changes. Article after article have addressed how both the evolving needs of contemporary foreign language students and paradigmatic theoretical shifts in the humanities, along with the increasingly corporatist approach that administrators have come to apply in managing higher education, have provoked important curricular changes in many foreign language departments, which have, often against the will of many faculty members, incorporated into the curriculum the study of nonliterary genres of cultural production and more sociologically oriented critical approaches to cultural

analysis. The gradual incorporation of research and pedagogy best classified under the rubric of cultural studies in departments formerly identified exclusively with the study of language and literature, narrowly defined, is a well recognized fact, as is further emphasized in a *PMLA* forum in 1997 in which 33 members offered their opinions on the subject. A 2007 report by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” indeed posits a specific plan for curricular reform.

While the changes discussed in these venues apply as much to Spanish as to other languages, we believe that Spanish must be treated separately. Unlike other major European languages such as French and German, which have experienced a marked decrease in enrollments over the past decades, Spanish enrollments have been booming for many years. Since the mid-1990s, college enrollments in Spanish have exceeded those of all foreign languages combined, and continue to rise year after year. In order to make sense of enrollment data in language programs, the MLA has taken to separating Spanish from its aggregate figures, reporting on enrollments in Spanish and in “other modern languages” (Furman, Goldberg and Lusin). This unprecedented enrollment growth does not merely reflect the “popularity” of Spanish among college students, but the language’s special status: it has become increasingly apparent that Spanish is not a foreign language at all, but the second language of the United States. While the federal government might not be prepared to recognize its importance, to university students, its key role in US culture and everyday life is quite obvious, as their eagerness to learn Spanish attests. Indeed, enrollment figures would be much higher if universities did not cap Spanish enrollments in order to persuade students to study foreign languages such as French and German. As Carlos Alonso argues, “if there is increased anxiety in the other foreign language departments about how to deal with the Spanish boom, it is because Spanish has spilled out of the bounds of the category that encompasses foreign languages in North American academia” (Alonso 220).

We take as a point of departure Alonso’s assertion that “the key issue that departments of Spanish are currently facing is their change in

status from a department of foreign language to something resembling a department of a second national language and culture in this country” (Alonso 220) in analyzing why the kinds of changes occurring in foreign languages departments such as French and German seem to be occurring much more slowly in Spanish programs, and in proposing some specific curricular and structural reforms for Spanish departments. We take into account the particular history of Hispanism in the US academy along with the role that Spanish has assumed as a national second language in interpreting the dynamics of the field that make it difficult for Spanish departments to implement the kinds of changes we believe are necessary, while signaling some progressive innovations that a handful of programs have put into practice.

Crisis and Change in Foreign Language Programs

Enrollments in French and German, the most studied “other modern languages” among US college students, have dropped markedly from their high points in the late 1960s. 1968 enrollment figures of 388,000 and 216,000, respectively, fell to 272,000 and 133,000 in 1990, and currently (as of 2006) stand at 206,000 and 94,000 (Furman, Goldberg and Lusin 10). Meanwhile, Spanish, which became the most popular “foreign” language, overtaking the long held position of French by 1970, saw enrollments jump from 365,000 in 1968 to 534,000 in 1990, and to 823,000 in 2006. The crisis in French and German is partly the result of the importance Spanish has assumed in US culture. However, study at the upper division has suffered as well because of students’ shifting attitudes toward print culture.

Foreign language programs have traditionally been structured around lower level courses focused on language learning and upper division courses in literature. As the National Endowment for the Arts reported in 2004, “the percentage of adult Americans reading literature has dropped dramatically over the past twenty years” (Bradshaw and Nichols ix) and the rate of decline is accelerating (Bradshaw and Nichols x). These declines reflect all age groups, but are most pronounced among young adults (Bradshaw and Nichols xi). It appears that the increasing prominence of

electronic media has profoundly affected the US populace's relationship with print culture. N. Katherine Hayles hypothesizes that "we are in the midst of a generational shift in cognitive styles that poses challenges to education at all levels" (187). She warns, "educators face a choice: change the students to fit the educational environment or change that environment to fit the students" (195).

In the case of foreign language programs, there really is no choice since many students will simply choose not to enroll in programs that do not appeal to their interests or learning goals. They must recognize that "print will no longer be the premier means of communication" (Furman 70). Many departments, faced with the staff and budget cuts typically associated with falling enrollments, have already responded to this trend. The obvious move has been to expand curricular offerings to incorporate a greater variety of course content in the cultural genres of mass media and popular culture, in essence incorporating central aspects of the field of cultural studies into their upper division curricula. The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, recommends "replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole" (237). It further asserts, "for those students... who enjoy literary studies, one path to the major should be through literature. But to attract students from other fields and students with an interest beyond literary studies,... departments should institute courses that address a broad range of curricular needs" (239).

The "cultural turn in literary scholarship" and pedagogy (Byrnes 118) is occurring rapidly among language departments in crisis. Departments of German literature, for example, have been reconceptualizing themselves as departments of German studies, "a variant of cultural studies" (Berman 168; see also Chaouli 55). The "rise of cultural studies" has been rapid, according to Michael Holquist, writing in 2002, and indeed cultural studies "now seems hegemonic under its various and constantly proliferating subsets" (Holquist 73). Even language departments such as Chinese and Japanese, which have seen huge enrollment increases over the last few decades—although they remain small in comparison with

even German, with 2006 national enrollment levels of 67,000 in Japanese and 52,000 in Chinese (Furman, Goldberg and Lusin 10)—have frequently adopted a “cultural studies model” often under the rubric of East Asian studies (Shirane 73).

This shift has not necessarily replicated the field of cultural studies within these discrete language based units, but has instead selectively incorporated key elements of cultural studies, including prominently “the breakdown of the traditional barriers between elite and popular, literary and nonliterary, textual and material culture” (Shirane 73). This particular reformulation of cultural studies does not necessarily share the political bent of mainstream cultural studies, nor does it necessarily concern itself with the relationship between culture and power. However, it does bring into play the interdisciplinarity that is central to the field as it is clear that “interdisciplinary research and teaching hold the best possibilities for generating the increased enrollments that administrators will be eyeing as they assess the viability of all units, but especially of small units, a category to which many foreign language departments belong” (Scullion 133).

This move toward cultural studies and interdisciplinary teaching has been tricky for several reasons. One is that most foreign language faculty have been trained to teach courses in language, linguistics and/or literature only, and not in other areas such as film and electronic media, visual culture or popular culture. The MLA Ad Hoc Committee itself glosses over this issue, continuing to recommend traditional training in literature for foreign language majors intending to go on to earn a doctorate (239), thus implying that foreign language instructors will continue to teach using genres of cultural production in which they are not trained to be critics. As a result, “cultural studies” teaching in foreign language departments has the potential to seem easy and superficial in comparison to the teaching of literary classics. Writes Lauren Berlant, in reference to cultural studies in general:

because humanists traditionally accrue value by being intimate with the classics (literary and theoretical), those who think through popular materials and contextualize them through atypical kinds of rhetoric threaten to degrade the value of intellectual life in general and of the humanities in particular. That is to say, it is not the popularity or the contemporaneity of the materials that makes this

work feel precarious but the sense that the stories told about the materials aren't hard enough, that they require too little overcoming of temporal, cultural, or linguistic alterity. (Berlant 109-10)

Scholars in communication, the sociology of culture, or cultural anthropology may teach using these kinds of materials without their intellectual integrity being questioned, as each field brings its own sophisticated theoretical apparatus to bear on cultural texts. Cultural studies, too, offers its own theoretical apparatus, including much read texts of the Frankfurt School, the Birmingham School, postcolonial and subaltern studies, gender and queer studies, critical race studies, film and media studies, science and technology studies, and so on—the many readers in cultural studies theory (e.g. During; Durham and Kellner; Miller; Ryan) make clear that this broad and somewhat amorphous field does indeed have its own core critical apparatus. However, few foreign language department faculty have formally studied cultural studies theory.

The solution requires a transition to or incorporation of cultural studies that goes beyond the mere expanding of the range of materials (cultural objects) studied, and actually rigorously integrates the critical methodologies of cultural studies, which most foreign language programs have yet to figure out how to accomplish.

The Case of Spanish

While this “cultural turn” has been felt across the humanities, its reverberations in Spanish departments have been less pronounced than in German or French. The vast majority of language department scholars cited above (Furman, Berman, Holquist, Byrnes, Chaouli, Scullion) teach French or German, and not Spanish. One reason for the apparent lack of concern among Spanish professors is that there has been no crisis in Spanish, and therefore there has been little urgency to rethink the curriculum. At many universities, upper division Spanish classes regularly fill to capacity regardless of the subject matter.

However, there is a resistance to change in the field of Spanish that has nothing to do with enrollments and is deeply rooted in the history of the field. Spanish in the US academy, although a separate entity with its own trajectory, grew from the tradition of “Hispanism” in Spain (Resina,

"Hispanism"). Hispanism in the context of US university pedagogy is nowadays a stodgy term, implying to many the idea of the teaching of Spanish and Spanish language literature as "an emanation of empire,... a postcolonial ideology engaged in promoting hegemonic ambitions by cultural means" (Resina, "Whose Hispanism" 161). Founded in the US academy, like French and German, as a "national language" project, US Hispanism traditionally assumed "the spiritual centrality and dominance of Spain" and assigned "a subservient departmental role for anything involving Spanish America" (Shumway 285). A flux of Spanish intellectuals exiled during the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent Franco dictatorship "found homes in United States universities" where they were "quite nationalistic in their desire to place the literature of Spain at the center of Hispanic studies in the US academy" (Shumway 294).

Spanish literature has never held the *cachet* of French or German literature in international circles. Hispanist scholars have had to ceaselessly promote the study of works such as *Don Quijote* or the poetry and dramas of García Lorca as "great literature" as they attempted to compete for the attention of literature students who often saw more prestige in the works of Proust or Goethe. The cold war "boom" in Latin American literature—roughly accompanied by a new influx of Spanish speaking intellectuals, mainly from the Southern Cone and Cuba—transformed Spanish departments by cultivating interest in Latin American literature, which brought new prestige to the field along with US government investment in "area studies" education.

In Latin America and in Latin American studies in the United States, literary criticism has a long tradition of concern with the social and political realities of Latin American nation states. Luminaries of Latin American literary criticism of the same cold war era that saw the rise of Latin American literary studies in the United States—some major figures include Ángel Rama, Antonio Cândido, Jean Franco, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and Antonio Cornejo Polar—today are seen not from a canon of Hispanist philology, but as precursors to Latin American cultural studies (Ríos; Kuhnheim and Anderson 5). As Hernán Vidal, himself renowned for the preoccupation with the theme of human rights that characterizes his

scholarly work (with titles such as *Crítica literaria como defensa de los derechos humanos*), avowed in 2002: “Latin American literary studies abandoned the notion of canon more than two decades ago now, a little after the ‘boom’ in narrative fiction. Responding to events such as the ‘National Security’ dictatorships, the Nicaraguan Revolution, and the civil war in El Salvador, the field instead sought to organize professional debate, research and teaching around the social problematics that formed the thematic nuclei of literary, sociological, anthropological and testimonial texts” (Vidal 145, translation ours). Furthermore, while interdisciplinary debates on culture and politics might take place productively in many social science departments (anthropology, sociology, or even political science) in Latin America, in the US—where many such departments have been more likely to favor quantitative over qualitative analysis—such debates have been most likely to take place in Spanish departments, further contributing to the shift away from a focus on aesthetics in literary criticism.

The defense of national literature, especially peninsular Spanish literature, which has traditionally fueled US Hispanism, clashed with the much more socially and politically committed project of many cold war era Latin Americanists. This split continues to be an important factor in determining the shape of upper division and graduate curricula in Spanish departments. While individuals do not necessarily fall quite so readily into these two camps, the field is often viewed in just these terms:

Traditional Hispanists have frequently been cast as figures of comic relief who disdain theory, defend literature (a word reverentially uttered with a capital L and two sharply enunciated t’s), and visibly shudder at the thought of including popular culture and political concerns in teaching and scholarship... Latin Americanists... have been seen as competing for space onstage and as sometimes overplaying their roles—they interpret all works from a political perspective, they simplistically reduce literature to sociological models, and they display woefully inadequate aesthetic sensibilities. (Kuhnheim and Anderson 3)

The field has been fraught for decades with ongoing struggles for dominance between Peninsularist and Latin Americanist colleagues. These struggles have increasingly taken on additional characteristics with Peninsularists often assuming the long standing Hispanist position of defending the role of traditional literary criticism (e.g., philology,

formalism) as central to the mission of US Spanish departments, and Latin Americanists often seeking ways to incorporate the more interdisciplinary and politically oriented approaches to literary criticism. Sociopolitical readings of literature have in turn led to a critique of what Latin Americanists know as “the lettered city,” a term coined by Ángel Rama in the early 1980s to refer to the central role of a small minority of urban elite in shaping national cultures in Latin America through their domination of the public sphere (including literature, but also politics, journalism, the judiciary, etc.). Latin Americanist concern for social and political oppression led them to turn to other more “popular” forms of cultural expression including, for example, film, and especially the *testimonio* genre, effectively adopting a “cultural studies” critical worldview. Thus, struggles for curricular reform—a curricular reform not at all urgent in an era of rapidly rising enrollments—in Spanish departments have often been confused in terms of the long standing departmental fissure between peninsularists and Latin Americanists.

Departmental battles have encompassed both struggles to control faculty lines and to occupy strategically important space within the curriculum. Many departments have been happy to call a stalemate by ceding faculty lines to Latin Americanists, while maintaining a 50-50 presence in the curriculum. Latin Americanist Idelber Avelar’s 1999 plea to peninsularists regarding his “observation that a 2:1 ratio between the number of specialists in Spanish literature and the number of specialists in the literatures of the nineteen Spanish American countries—a ratio still common in many departments—is quite simply not compatible with the present state of the discipline” (Avelar 57, n9) has indeed had little reverberation in the field, as most Spanish departments are content to submit to “the far from negligible power of inertia” (Resina, “Whose Hispanism” 172), an inertia that has come to be associated, often with feelings of resentment among Latin Americanists, with “Hispanism’s reputed backwardness” (Resina, “Hispanism” 86). Nonetheless, the fact that Spanish departments are more likely to gain faculty lines than to lose them in times of rising enrollments diffuses the tensions, which indeed have often been more pronounced in Modern or Romance Language

departments where Spanish (including both its peninsular and Latin American wings) has gained lines lost by languages such as French.

The result of these turf wars combined with rising and sometimes overwhelming enrollments has been that there is no time to think about curricular reform. What happens more often than not is that change more likely occurs at the level of the individual than that of the department: “In their individual scholarly pursuits and in their pedagogical practices, foreign language faculty members have been working in creative ways to cross disciplinary boundaries, incorporate the study of all kinds of material in addition to the strictly literary, and promote wide cultural understanding through research and teaching” (MLA Ad Hoc Committee 237). However, it is much rarer that this type of pedagogy has been formally incorporated into the structure of the Spanish curriculum, whether at the undergraduate or the graduate level. It must be added that the increasing use of non tenure track labor, even for upper division teaching, has contributed to a shadow curriculum based foremost upon pressure to obtain outstanding teaching evaluations, which inevitably leads some faculty, especially those with no job security, to resort to teaching the cultural products that appear to be most agreeable to students and that seem not to require complex strategies of analysis or decodification.

On the other hand, considering not just students’ lack of interest in traditional literature, but their practical needs –which in the vast majority of the cases have very little to do with literature, narrowly defined– upper division study in Spanish (or other languages) “should be structured to produce a specific outcome: educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence” (MLA Ad Hoc Committee 237). The field of Spanish has been aware on some level of contemporary students’ needs for many years now. Avelar wrote in 1999 that a “traditional humanist notion of literacy” based on erudite literary study “has been clashing with increasing violence against a demand that some form of cultural literacy accompany foreign language learning, a demand heard everywhere in foreign language departments” (Avelar 50). However, the need for change in the field of Spanish goes beyond the impetus for a “cultural turn.”

Spanish as the Second Language of the United States

Román de la Campa writes in 2005 that Spanish departments, “once the guardians of Hispanism as a foreign language and literature, must now ask what it means—culturally, linguistically and theoretically—to live and work in the midst of forty million citizens of Hispanic and Latin American background in the United States” (De la Campa 303). The implications for the field are profound, as Carlos Alonso argues in a recent article that serves as a manifesto for reforming the field: “Departments of Spanish must engage in a complete reconceptualization of their curriculum that extends from language courses to advanced undergraduate and graduate seminars and that centers on the understanding that they are responsible for teaching and producing scholarship about an increasingly national cultural reality rather than a foreign one” (Alonso, “Spanish” 225). This shift, in a country that is a major center of transnational Spanish language mass media production, cannot merely be thought of in national or geographic terms: “the new situation of Spanish departments should guide a complete curricular redesign of Spanish as a field of study that posits culture, not literature, as its controlling category” (Alonso, “Spanish” 226). Moreover, “the hierarchies and distinctions within the Hispanic field must be rethought and exploded” (Alonso, “Spanish” 227).

There has been very little published on why university students choose to study Spanish. However, we as professors of Spanish can intuit some of them. A major population of upper division Spanish students in many parts of the country is made of up “heritage learners” of one kind or another. Many of them were born abroad in Spanish language countries, while others were born in the United States to families who migrated in a previous generation from those countries, and who often retain active ties with relatives abroad. These students wish to get in touch with their roots, to communicate better with their families and to formalize their knowledge of a language and culture that they know mostly through casual experience and not concentrated study.

Another subgroup of students, which overlaps significantly with the former group, has practical career oriented goals that have to do with serving Spanish-speaking populations of the United States. These students

are often pre-med or pre-law, or envision careers in social work, education, marketing or mass media. They strive to learn Spanish and to understand US Latino culture in order to work with that enormous and growing segment of the domestic population.

These first two subsets of Spanish majors and minors undoubtedly account for the vast majority in many parts of the country. Yet it is striking how difficult it has been for specialists in Latino studies to make inroads into Spanish departments. US Latino cultures, after all, grew from populations of often illiterate immigrants who hardly had any connection with literary traditions of Spain or Latin America. Part of the problem has been that Latino studies has always fit better with a cultural studies paradigm than with traditional Hispanism, with its insistence of the centrality of literature and the importance of linguistic purity. Indeed in the early years, as George Mariscal points out, Chicano (and presumably Latino) studies “faced the open hostility of traditional Spanish departments, where senior faculty from Spain referred to Chicano/a literature as ‘barrio trash’” (Mariscal 63).

While many students, then, are motivated to study Spanish not as a foreign language, but as the second language of the United States, a third subset of students (once again, with significant overlap with the previous two groups) is conscious of the importance of Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Chile, etc. as international trade partners of the United States. Many students work toward careers in international business—or in diplomacy, or nongovernmental organizations serving the Americas. The United States government dialogues regularly with the entire region, for example within the Organization of American States, and with individual countries regarding trade agreements, foreign aid, drug trafficking issues, and so on. Organizations such as Amnesty International and the Peace Corps are actively involved in Latin America, while many churches operate missionary networks throughout the hemisphere. Students are aware that Spanish is not only the second most spoken language in the United States, but the third most spoken language in the world.

Other students may have in mind less career oriented motivations, such as wanderlust. Mexico is the top destination for foreign travel from the

United States, with over twenty million trips made by US residents in 2005, with many more traveling to the Spanish speaking Caribbean, Spain, Central and South America (Office of Travel and Tourism Industries). Many students are inspired to major in Spanish through study abroad experiences in such countries as Argentina, Spain, Chile, Mexico or Ecuador. Many more simply dream of travel to far away lands, and hope to be able to realize those dreams to their fullest by being able to communicate competently in and feeling knowledgeable about the places they will visit.

While many students continue to enjoy reading, notwithstanding the recent NEA report, none of the reasons for studying Spanish presented above point to any special role for literature in achieving appropriate linguistic and cultural competency. Of course, literature is a wonderful tool for teaching culture, but it is not the only one, nor is it necessarily inherently superior to, say, journalism, cinema, cultural criticism, or political discourse as a pedagogical tool. Nor do any of these goals call for Spain to have any special status vis-à-vis Latin America. In fact, it would seem that the most important cultures to students would be those of the countries most closely engaged with the United States, whether through international trade, tourism, diplomacy, or migration—and if any one country stands out here it is not Spain, but Mexico—and the United States itself, i.e. the Latino cultures of Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, etc.

The case for the centrality of Mexico is strong, but apparently not evident to most Spanish departments, which tend to treat Mexico as just one Latin American country of many. Although there are well over 23 million US residents of Mexican heritage, making Mexican Americans by far the largest national heritage group among US Latinos, and although a huge chunk of US geography—including the two most populous states of the country—were formerly part of Mexico—i.e., despite a number of compelling reasons that make the study of Mexico, both a major presence and influence within contemporary US culture and also a major foreign trade partner and tourist destination, the main interest of many students enrolled in upper division Spanish programs—we know of no Spanish

department that has more Mexicanists than Peninsularists. Indeed many top Spanish departments have no faculty at all who specialize in Mexico.

Three specific reforms would seem to be in order, then, for the field of Spanish: 1) a pronounced move from a literary to a cultural studies focus; 2) a displacement of Spain in departmental hierarchies, accompanied by an increased focus on Mexico (and Latin America in general); 3) a prominent role for US Latino culture. While some might argue that shaping curriculum to suit demands of students is nothing more than “catering to a narrow-minded consumerism” (Resina, “Whose Hispanism” 182, n3), we have not seen a better alternative—and old school Hispanism’s project is clearly of little help any more.

Curricular Reality in Spanish Programs

In order to get an idea of the degree to which the field of Spanish has been responding (or not) to the changing needs of students, we surveyed thirty one of the approximately sixty PhD granting programs in Spanish in the United States. While we tried to include both public and private universities, programs both large and small, schools located in both urban and nonurban settings in all regions of the country, we realize that our sample, although large, may not be truly unbiased.¹ Nonetheless, the trends we noticed are so pronounced that there is little question regarding their statistical significance. We looked at both undergraduate and graduate programs, focusing on the role of cultural studies and on regional content (Spain, Latin America, Mexico and especially the Latino United States) to see what innovations are being introduced to Spanish department curricula. We focused on specific aspects of the curriculum:

¹ Schools surveyed include: Catholic University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Duke University, Florida State University, Michigan State University, New York University, Ohio State University, Princeton University, Stanford University, State University of New York-Stony Brook, Tulane University, University of Arizona, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Davis, University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-Santa Barbara, University of Chicago, University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign, University of Indiana-Bloomington, University of Kansas, University of Miami, University of Michigan, University of Oregon, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, Universidad de Puerto Rico-Río Piedras, University of Texas-Austin, University of Virginia, Vanderbilt University

courses in literature (including both the presence of courses on literature, and the critical approaches applied: literary surveys or courses focused on period or genre typical of traditional literary studies curricula; courses designed around theoretical or thematic interrogations of literary texts that would be associated with more of a cultural studies approach to literature), culture (including any other genres of cultural production such as film, music, visual arts, etc.), and theory (literary theory, cultural studies theory, etc.). We did not consider the role of linguistics courses, advanced language skills courses (composition, conversation, grammar), or instrumentalist approaches to language study (Spanish for business or health sciences). Nor did we try to unpack the difference between “civilization” and “culture” surveys, which may reflect vastly different pedagogical goals—providing historical cultural background to literary studies and teaching appreciation versus introducing critical questions of values, power and identity from the perspective of cultural history (Kuhnheim and Anderson 10)—but whose approaches may not be evident in course titles. Our interrogation was also limited by the information available on or through departmental websites. The material reviewed typically included departmental mission statements, detailed descriptions of Spanish major options and requirements, MA and PhD requirements, catalogue course listings, current and recent course offerings, and often syllabi or detailed course descriptions. In most cases, the information was sufficient to draw solid conclusions regarding the department’s will to update its curriculum or innovate. The only piece of data that was missing in a significant number of cases (eleven of thirty) was MA reading lists, which are circulated only in the form of photocopy in some programs.

With regard to undergraduate programs, cultural studies clearly have infiltrated the curricula of many universities. Many classes are offered on film, popular music, social conflicts, *testimonio*, visual culture, race, etc. However, the place of cultural studies in the curriculum continues to be marginal in most programs. For example, at the University of Chicago, even though the description of the major points to a focus on both literature and other genres of cultural production “such as visual art and film,” and on

“interdisciplinary themes,”² all upper division courses that cover these topics are listed as “literature” courses. It would seem that at Chicago (and this pattern repeats at numerous other universities), the curriculum is being reformed from the inside out: course content has changed, but the former structure remains. At universities such as Kansas, Indiana-Bloomington and Vanderbilt, many courses have a cultural studies bent; however, major requirements are weighted toward literature. At Vanderbilt, even linguistics track students have more required literature courses than culture courses. Cultural studies in many Spanish majors exist only as electives. The most traditional programs, and a few programs present themselves inflexibly as such, focus their major almost exclusively on the teaching of canonical literature.

Of the programs surveyed, three stood out for their conceptualization as “Hispanic Studies” or “Spanish Studies” programs. The “studies” model, common in programs of modern or romance languages, where colleagues in “other modern languages” have been compelled to enact curricular reform, often incorporates a more overt cultural studies approach into the core of the program, without necessarily displacing the study of literature. Duke, for example, offers four “studies” options: Spanish Studies; Spanish and Latin American Studies; Spanish, Latin American and Brazilian Studies; and Spanish and European Studies, all of which require literary surveys, but are primarily configured as “interdisciplinary tracks.”³ The University of Pennsylvania’s Hispanic Studies major has no literature requirements at all (aligning the program not so much with the language centered focus of, say, English, but with the more unequivocally interdisciplinary focus of American Studies), while Columbia’s major in Hispanic Studies not only does not require specific courses in literature, but does require three introductory culture courses, “Introduction to Spanish Cultures,” which introduces “the discipline of Cultural Studies” so as to give students “the conceptual framework with

² <http://rl.uchicago.edu/undergraduate/spanish.shtml>

³ <http://www.romancestudies.aas.duke.edu/undergraduate/spanishmajor.html>

which to engage in the study of Hispanic culture”⁴, and two cultural history courses. Columbia’s program is the only one we found that has truly reconstructed itself from scratch with cultural studies at its core; most other programs appear to have introduced changes without significantly upsetting the status quo that maintains a central focus on literature.

While no other program compared to Columbia’s for its innovative structure, several did include novel elements. For example, both Stanford and Ohio State University feature courses on Latin American indigenous cultures, an area largely marginalized by traditional Hispanism because it frequently involves cultural production in languages other than Spanish. Sara Castro-Klarén, a Professor of Latin American culture and literature at Johns Hopkins University, criticizes “the ill-defined and poorly theorized field of Spanish” (Castro-Klarén 16) for its treatment of multilingual Latin America through a monolingual Spanish lens, which she sees as a major problem for her field of colonial studies:

For a course in colonial studies, which by definition is interdisciplinary, it means that what we have termed pre-Columbian texts must be read in Spanish only, not in the original Maya-Quiché and not in English translation, as if Spanish were the original language in which they had been composed and ‘written.’ This stand thus affirms the idea that translation into Spanish is authentic and appropriate, perhaps even natural, for a pre-Columbian text. It is as if moving from the Maya-Quiché in the sixteenth century into Spanish were a problem-free cultural and political act. (Castro-Klarén 17)

While the legacy of Hispanism continues in nearly every program in which the “Hispanic world” is routinely divided between Spain and its former colonies (Spanish America), the University of Arizona conceptualizes its major in a slightly different fashion, dividing the field in three: Spanish, Latin American, and Mexican/Mexican-American cultures. While US Latino literature and culture are featured in many (but not all) contemporary programs, Arizona’s is the only program to introduce a transnational concept (greater Mexico) into its core of study, and to recognize the central importance of Mexico for contemporary students of

⁴<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/spanish/undergraduate/courses/spanish/spancours.html>

Spanish. Similarly, the Universidad de Puerto Rico separates study into three categories: Spanish, Latin American, and Puerto Rican literatures.

Another interesting case is that of UCLA, whose Spanish major is largely old school, with most upper division courses described in terms of traditional literary studies paradigms (genre, period, canonical works). However, in addition to the traditional track, students majoring in Spanish may choose an alternative option in “Spanish and Community and Culture.” This innovative track recognizes the importance of Spanish in Los Angeles, aiming to give students “cultural competence and understanding” through opportunities to “conduct research and combine theories in class with experience gained in the field” and to “foster civic engagement”⁵ through classes with titles such as “Taking It to the Street: Spanish in the Community.”

While programs such as those of Arizona and UCLA position themselves at the vanguard with regard to Latino studies, and other universities have instituted Latino literature or culture requirements (University of California-Davis) or tracks (Stanford, Cornell), most merely include US Latino culture, central as it may be to student’s motivations in studying Spanish, as a marginal element of the curriculum, whether in elective courses or as a minor theme embedded in a handful of literature or culture courses, and more than a few programs appear not to offer any courses at all in this area.

Although almost unheard of at the undergraduate level (a rare exception being the University of California-Santa Barbara, which requires majors to take three surveys in Spanish literature and two in Latin American literature), at the graduate level, the most traditional programs continue to be weighted toward peninsular literature. The MA reading list at the University of Virginia, for example, includes about twice as many Spanish as Spanish American texts, and completely excludes US Latino literature. At the University of Colorado-Boulder, students in the Spanish and Spanish American Literature graduate program are required to take one course in each of seven areas, four of which are defined in terms of peninsular literature. While senior Latin Americanist scholars such as

⁵ <http://www.spanport.ucla.edu/content/view/174/108/>

Nicolás Shumway argue that “we must be bold in recognizing the ways Spanish-centric Hispanism continues to distort the curricula of Hispanic Studies” as most “literature programs are still organized with Spain at the center and everyone else in a marginalized amalgamation that recalls terms like *las colonias*” (Shumway 296), the field has not responded: for example, the MLA’s governing body includes five representatives from peninsular fields, but only three from Latin American fields.⁶ A paradoxical case is that of Michigan State University, which offers a progressive looking PhD in Hispanic Cultural Studies that features an optional interdisciplinary emphasis in Literature of the Americas, yet presents a sequence of required courses for its traditional looking MA in Hispanic Literature that is weighted toward peninsular literature (four courses) over Latin American literature (three courses).

Some departments have incorporated multicultural approaches into their graduate programs. The University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign offers PhD track options in Iberian Literatures and Cultures or Latin American and Latina/o Literatures and Cultures, neither of which define themselves in strictly national or linguistic terms, and both of which explicitly incorporate cultural studies theory by referring in their mission statements not only to literature, but to multiple genres of cultural production, “intellectual traditions” and themes of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, imperialism, globalization, power, etc.⁷ Programs such as this one feature Latino studies as part of their core, as does the University of Arizona, which offers a PhD track in Border Studies. However, many graduate program websites do not make any mention of US Latino literature or culture at all (e.g., Catholic University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Kansas, Princeton University), reflecting Shumway’s observation that “Spanish departments in the United States have often been notoriously inhospitable to US Latino literature” (Shumway 297).

The transformation of traditional literary curricula into programs in cultural studies at the graduate level is never easy, particularly given that

⁶ <http://www.mla.org/divisions>

⁷ <http://www.sip.uiuc.edu/spanish/graduate/>

most or sometimes all Spanish department faculty members have been trained as literary and not cultural studies scholars. Rather than restructuring the curriculum in ways that make the contributions of specialists in literary or cultural studies more essential than those of the other group, many programs have adopted a strategy of eliminating most required courses or reading lists and permitting graduate students to construct their own individualized programs of study, allowing them to form themselves as either literary or cultural studies scholars, or as both. Many PhD programs, including those of Duke University, University of Michigan, Stanford University, Columbia University and Cornell University emphasize individualized curricula that can be tailored to student preferences, which can be problematic as it guarantees comprehensive preparation in neither literary studies nor cultural studies. Only a few programs, such as the very traditional one at the University of Colorado-Boulder, remain structured as narrowly defined literature programs with no reference at all on their website or course listings to any nonliterary material.

A few graduate programs have experimented with the introduction of structural elements in cultural studies to their curricula. For example, Tulane University's MA exams include five fields, the first four being traditional literary fields (two peninsular, two Latin American), and the fifth to be selected from among four options: cultural studies theory, film criticism and theory, critical theory or linguistics, each of which is defined by a standardized list of texts. The University of Pennsylvania's standardized PhD exam lists include the typical genres: poetry, prose, essay, theater, along with texts in literary and cultural history, theory and criticism, but also creates a new canon of Spanish and Latin American films, a genre seldom taken seriously in PhD programs, despite the fact that film has been prominently incorporated into undergraduate pedagogy at most universities.

Finally, despite the field's history of resistance to theory of any kind (Alonso, "Cultural Studies"), most programs nowadays incorporate "literary theory" into their graduate curriculum, usually as a requirement, with only a few more traditional programs apparently eschewing theory entirely.

However, a handful of programs have begun to redefine their theory requirement by explicitly incorporating cultural studies theory. The University of Pittsburgh's doctorate in Hispanic Languages and Literatures, which includes a built-in emphasis in Latin American literature and cultural studies (peninsular Spanish can be studied only as a minor), features a core course titled "Introduction to Cultural Analysis."⁸ Columbia, Ohio State and Florida State Universities all require courses in literary and cultural theory. At other universities, course content in "literary theory" may be shifting, as is the case with a Fall 2008 course in "literary theory" that professor Román de la Campa retooled as "Contemporary Issues in Critical Theory, Literary and Cultural Studies."⁹

Conclusions

De la Campa, in a recent article, cites a proposal for curricular reform originally posited by Andreas Huyssen that essentially brings cultural studies to bear on Spanish graduate study in the United States. He proposes, among other things, to

abandon the traditional split between high and low culture that opposes serious art and literature to mass culture,... approach the topic of media in all its historical, technical and theoretical complexity,... abandon the notion that the well-deserved critiques of elite cultures will play the role in political and social transformations that was reserved for the avant-garde,... [and] map a new comparative approach to cultural studies able to link disciplines such as cultural history and anthropology with literary and artistic histories. (De la Campa 309).

A browse of just this abridged list makes clear that the incorporation of cultural studies theory into Spanish programs is not a casual endeavor (e.g. substituting movies for novels, or popular songs for poems in Spanish undergraduate syllabi), but implies a profound engagement with cultural theory.

The above mentioned case of De la Campa's course in "literary theory" is indicative of a general trend in the field: a move toward cultural studies carried out by individual professors, without upsetting the status quo. The problem with this approach is that an individual student's

⁸ <http://www.pitt.edu/~hispan/graduate/gradcourses.html>

⁹ <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/roml/spanish/graduate/fall2008grad.html>

experience is determined not by a well conceived and executed program of study, but by which professor happens to teach key courses at a given moment. Once again, change in this field tends to occur more often on an individual level than on a structural level. Only in rare cases are the less traditional approaches or areas of study that are most relevant to undergraduate (and by extension to graduate) education in the contemporary United States—cultural studies, US Latino studies, Mexican studies, border studies, film studies—systematically incorporated into graduate education in Spanish.

Avelar sent out a challenge to the field in 1999: “How do we rethink the role of Spanish programs in the era of the dissemination of critical theory, the Latinization of the United States, the culturalization of literature, the globalization of culture, and the permeabilization of national and disciplinary borders?” (Avelar 50). It seems that the field has responded with great timidity. Alonso argued again, much more recently, for a radical reconceptualization of Spanish programs (one with which he and his colleagues, clearly the exceptions to the rule, appear to have made some important strides at Columbia, where he currently serves as both Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies) by “mak[ing] use of all the insights available from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, performance studies, feminism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and so on, not as fetishized paradigms but as conceptual maps to help Spanish navigate the currents of its contemporary institutional mainstream secondariness” (227). We tend to rest on our laurels by viewing our booming enrollments in comparison with those of “other modern languages” and not recognizing that our fields are not comparable, that Spanish is not a foreign language in the United States. Seen from this perspective, we cannot say that the field of Spanish is not in crisis: indeed, our enrollments should be much greater than they are, perhaps approaching those of English departments. Until we radically rethink and restructure all our programs, undergraduate and graduate alike, to reflect the reality of the contemporary role of Spanish in the United States and in the globalized Americas, and the role of nonliterary culture in the contemporary world, we are doing a great disservice to our students.

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