A Model of Assessment

When Romance Languages and Literatures launched a multiyear assessment of its undergraduate programs in Fall 2006, it didn’t do so solely in its capacity as a foreign language department.

"This is responding to a movement in higher education, which has emerged only in the last two or three years, and it’s the humanities, generally speaking, that [is] the context for this new movement on assessment,” says Chairperson Theodore Cachey, professor of Italian.

The charge, formally articulated earlier this year by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, is to increase accountability in the American system of higher education to ensure students realize their full potential.

While it may be a simple proposition, its execution is anything but.

In light of this, Romance Languages and Literatures first devoted two years to the formulation of detailed learning goals for its undergraduate majors as well as its upper- and lower-division courses. The goals are communicated to students in class and via the Department’s website (romancelanguages.nd.edu).

"Not only were they based on the ACTFL [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages] guidelines, but they were also based on the needs of the student population here, and that is very unique,” says Virginie Askildson, a specialist in foreign language pedagogy who joined the Notre Dame faculty this fall.

“Another unique mark of where we’re at in that group of [schools] really forging ahead and [being] ahead of the game is this idea of the faculty interaction across the board,” adds Shauna Williams, the Department’s director of undergraduate studies and assistant chairperson.

"It’s not only one program or the other or one set of faculty or the other.”

With its goals in place, the Department has turned its attention to assessment itself, with Cachey stressing that the focus is on programs, continued on page 3

NEH Fellowship Lets Moevs Contemplate the Contemplative Tradition

There’s something about the way Associate Professor Christian Moevs describes his typical day on research leave that suggests a living connection to a different era.

"I get up, meditate, do surya namaskar—stretches, basically—and Tao yoga, eat breakfast, and aim to be in my writing-thinking chair … by 9:00," he says. "I always think and work best at home. Most days I work till 5:00 or 6:00, often but not always with a short lunch break and nap. Then I work out or run and do yoga, eat, meditate, and go to bed.”

If not exactly roughing it on Walden Pond, Moevs is nevertheless leading something of a solitary scholarly existence these days.

On leave with a research fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)—one of 37 won by Notre Dame faculty since 1999, the most by any university faculty in the country during that time—he is at work on a book titled Dante’s Mystics: The Comedy and the Contemplative Tradition. continued on page 2
Grad’s Fortunes Bode Well for Ph.D. in Literature Program

James Hussar had the best possible final semester a doctoral candidate can have. By last January, he had accepted a tenure-track position at his number one choice—California State University, Fullerton, in the modern languages and literatures department—allowing him to cancel interviews at more than a dozen other campuses.

Hussar’s story strikes a particularly celebratory chord because he is the first graduate of Notre Dame’s innovative Ph.D. in Literature Program, which enrolled its first class in 2002. In it, students have the opportunity to follow multiple languages and literatures across native tongues and national boundaries; a majority of them have a primary field in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures.

The interdisciplinary program was birthed by such distinguished faculty as Margaret Doody, John and Barbara Glynn Family Professor of Literature and its first director, and Vittorio Hino, Paul G. Kimball Professor of Arts and Letters. Proponents of the program “intuitively,” says the current director, Joseph Buttigieg, William B. Kernan Jr. Professor of English, that language and literature studies would have to head in new directions in a shifting, multilingual, global society.

Over the years, the program has developed many invaluable supporters, including Buttigieg says, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, the Kough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, and the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre.

“I have been blessed by the number of faculty who have been willing to help me with letters of recommendation, directed reading, advice on courses,” says Hussar, who won a 2008 Shabazz Graduate School Award as Notre Dame’s top graduating doctoral student in the humanities. “This is a very gracious faculty.”

Previously a middle school and high school Spanish teacher—who, incidentally, considers teaching at Notre Dame a “utopian” experience—Hussar entered the program with an interest in not just Spanish but also Portuguese and Luso-Brazilian literature. Not many doctoral programs met his requirements, he says.

The Ph.D. in Literature was “an ideal fit” because he and his other students had such influence on the direction their research took. His dissertation, for instance, was about Latin American Jewish literature, an interest derived in part from working with Rabbi Michael Sigert, Abrams Professor of Jewish Thought and Culture.

Ultimately, Hussar hoped to be a good candidate for a Romance languages teaching position. For him, choosing the Ph.D. in Literature instead of a traditional Spanish Ph.D. program was the best way to reach that goal. “I’m not sure I sacrificed anything,” Hussar says. “But I’m sure I gained.”

*Story contributed by ND Works, Notre Dame’s faculty/staff newspaper

Department and Nanovic Institute Partner on New Graduate Fellowship

A group devoted to French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish, as well as their respective literatures would seem to have much in common with one concerned with the landscape of contemporary Europe. It probably comes as no surprise, then, that the Department works closely with Notre Dame’s Nanovic Institute for European Studies on a regular basis.

The latest fruits of that labor: Nanovic Research Fellowships in the Romance Languages and Literatures.

The fellowships were created for students pursuing one of the Department’s three master’s degrees—offered in French and Francophone Studies, Iberian and Latin American Studies, and Italian Studies—and who have research interests and/or career goals centered on any aspect of European language, literature, or culture. Applicants are evaluated based on academic achievement, potential for future academic and professional growth, and teaching record.

Granted a release from teaching for one to two semesters, a Nanovic Research Fellow focuses all of his or her energies on coursework, exam and thesis preparation, and research. During the fellowship, each chooses a faculty member to serve as a mentor.

Earlier this year, Eleonora Busoncini (Italian) and Kayce Swigelbon (French) were named the inaugural fellows. Students interested in applying should contact John Welle (welle@nd.edu), the Department’s director of graduate studies, for more information.

Grad Exchange Initiated With Premier French University

This fall, Romance Languages and Literatures launched a graduate exchange program at l’Université de Rennes 2 Haute Bretagne, the most important research center and higher education community for the humanities and social sciences in Western France.

“T first became familiar with the Université de Rennes 2 while I was serving as director of Notre Dame’s [undergraduate] study abroad program in Angers, France,” says Julia Doukhobw, professor of French and assistant provost for international studies.

Accepting an invitation from Professor Lauret Lesty, she began making monthly trips to Rennes 2 to attend meetings where doctoral students presented their research. This gave her the opportunity to get to know both students and faculty at the university. She notes that the “exciting intellectual atmosphere” there reminded her of being on the Notre Dame campus.

Her initial visits sparked a mutually beneficial dialogue between the two institutions, leading to, among other things, several lectures by Rennes 2 faculty at Notre Dame and, most recently, the graduate exchange.

“The exchange program ... marks an important collaborative relationship that will enrich both campuses in years ahead and allow for students of French at Notre Dame to gain access to the highest level of scholarly discourse in literary studies today,” Doukhobw says.

Any advanced graduate student with a specialization in French—whether pursuing an M.A. in French and Francophone Studies or a Ph.D. in a related area—can apply to the exchange program, provided he or she is in good academic standing. Marianne Perachios, a student in the Ph.D. in Literature Program, is in residence at Rennes 2 for the 2008–09 academic year.

At Notre Dame, Rennes 2 student Marie Sanquer is studying French literature and second-language teaching methodology as well as serving as a writing tutor in a program created by the Department and the University’s Writing Center.

Sorin Postdoctoral Fellowship Provides Valuable Opportunity

Notre Dame’s Edward Sorin Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, sponsored by the Graduate School and the College of Arts and Letters, annually provides several of the College’s recent Ph.D. recipients with an opportunity to further develop their research and gain teaching experience before they compete in the academic job market. Tenable for up to two years, the fellowships provide a salary of $35,000 per year, faculty health benefits, and an annual $2,000 research stipend.

James Krzes, who received his Ph.D. from the Medieval Institute in August and specializes in medieval Italian literature, was one of six fellowship recipients this year.

"First, the Sorin Fellowship is a great opportunity for me to develop my teaching profile," Krzes says. "I am grateful to have the opportunity to teach a range of language and literature courses in the Romance department. Second, the Sorin has allowed me to continue my research, this year by developing a second research interest and next year by returning to the dissertation to begin to work on the book manuscript." This semester, Krzes is teaching undergraduate courses in textual analysis and intermediate Italian. His current research project focuses on literary theory, Neoplatonism, and the erotic in the Renaissance; he is also writing an article based on his dissertation, which is titled "Furiole, parabol, istorie: The Genealogy of Boccaccio’s Theory of Allegory."

The master’s programs in Romance Languages and Literatures have a strong placement record. Former students are currently enrolled in doctoral programs at the University of California, Berkeley (two); the University of Chicago (three); Cornell University; Harvard University; Indiana University Bloomington; Princeton University (two); Stanford University (two); UCLA; the University of Wisconsin-Madison (four); and Yale University (two), among others.

In addition, M.A. alumni can be found in tenure-track/tenured positions at colleges and universities around the country. They include Angela Capodivucca (Italian ’00, Ph.D. UC Berkeley), assistant professor of Italian at Yale; Paul Fichtel (Italian ’09, Ph.D. Princeton), associate professor of Spanish at Stony Brook University; and Simone Marchesi (Italian ’07, Ph.D. Princeton), assistant professor of Italian at Princeton.
A medievalist with particular interests in religious literature, textual criticism, manu- script studies, and the relationships between lyric poetry and medieval romance, Maureen Boulton, professor of French, is in the second year of her three-year term as president of the North American branch of the International Courtly Literature Society. She is also the North American treasurer of the Anglo-Nor- man Text Society.

Theodore Cachey, professor of Italian and the Department’s chairperson, saw his edition of Antonio Pigafetta’s The First Voyage Around the World (1519–1522: An Account of Magel- lan’s Expedition published by the University of Toronto Press. Also the Albert J. and Helen M. Ravarino Family Director of Dante and Italian Studies, Cachey had his petrarch and Dante: Anti-Darwinism, Metaphysics, Tradition, which he co-edited with Zigmunt Baranski, accepted for publication by the University of Notre Dame Press. He spent Spring 2008 as a visiting professor at Yale University.

Pier Boitani, professor of comparative litera- ture at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” is in residence at Notre Dame this fall as the Albert J. and Helen M. Ravarino Family Distinguished Visiting Professor in Italian Studies. Along with Cachey (see above), he organized the June 2007 “Primo Colloquio,” an innovative meeting that convened scholars from La Sapienza and Notre Dame in Rome to discuss their works in progress; a second collo- quium will be held at Notre Dame this spring.

The Department’s faculty organized a num- ber of on-campus events in 2007–08, including lectures by Emmanuel Bouju (University of Rennes 2), Gary Ferguson (University of Delaware), Victor Fuentes (University of California, Santa Barbara), Luis-Giron Negri (Harvard University), Claudio Ginata (University of Trento), Joshua Landy (Stan- ford University), and Marta Pezzuto (New York University) as well as authors Evelyne Bloch-Dano and Chahdorri Djavann.

As a result of ongoing discussions about learning goals led by the Department’s Com- mittee for the Study of Romance Languages and Cultures, the Italian Studies Program created an interdisciplinary Italian studies concentration for undergraduates. Students who choose this option—the other being the program’s traditional literature and cul- ture concentration—take up five courses outside the Department as they complete the Italian major, supplementary major, or honors major. For more on undergraduate learning initiatives, see “A Model of Assess- ment” on page 4.

The Writing Tutors program, a joint entre- prise of the Department and Notre Dame’s Writing Center, offers students enrolled in various levels of Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese the necessary resources to improve their writing skills. In 2007–08, over 250 students were assisted by 14 peer tutors.

The annual Romance Languages and Litera- tures undergraduate convocation provided the winner of the Robert D. Nunez Award—given to the graduating senior with the highest GPA in any classical or modern foreign language—as well as the recipients of departmental prizes with the opportunity to reflect on their time at Notre Dame. Excerpts of all their speeches are reprinted here.

“I began studying French in high school, and I thought the language would be a great asset for travel and possibly for a job in the realm of international relations, but I hadn’t really thought about it as an area of study that was valuable in and unto itself. However, after studying abroad for an entire academic year in Angers, France, as a sophomore, I realized that the language was not just a tool of communication. The process of learning a lan- guage is inherently embedded with induction into an entire culture. For example, I found that a people’s idioms, common word choice, and even syntax can be telling about their values, customs, and traditions. I became engrossed in a whole area of literature that was previously less accessible to me, as I came to understand that reading translated works was rarely as satisfying as reading them in their original language. I came to realize that it isn’t until you read a book or a poem in the language it was intended for that the work can truly reveal itself to you.”

—Stephanie Braun (French)

“Winner of the Robert D. Nunez Award and the Walter Langford Award for Excellence in French Literature

“There is a French proverb which says, ‘A man who knows two languages is worth two men.’ Knowing a second language opens so many opportunities, and I’ve even been told that we all have different personalities in every language we learn, so perhaps we are actually two people if we know two different languages… I am deeply indebted to Notre Dame for all the opportunities I have had, and I truly hope none of us will lose those language skills we worked so hard to attain, no matter what career path we pursue.”

—Amanda Bode (French)

Winner of the Walter Langford Award for Excellence in French Literature

“In a world where nations and peoples are ever more dependent upon one another to supply goods and services, solve political disputes, and ensure international security, having an appreciation for Hispanic and Latin American culture is paramount. Indeed, lack of intercultural sensitivity can lead to mistrust and misunderstandings, to an inability to co- operate, negotiate, and compromise. Intercul- tural understanding begins with individuals like us who know fluent language abilities and who can thereby provide our own nation with an insider’s view into foreign cultures.”

—John Daly (Spanish)

Winner of the Walter Langford Award for Academic Excellence in Spanish

A college education is not, in the end, about the books we’ve read, or were supposed to have read; the lectures or discussions attend- ed, or the papers, problems, or projects we toiled over. A college education is about becoming conscious and critical and curious, in order to draw connections. The study of Romance languages and literatures specifically allowed us to tie together our understanding of the historical and cultural context that produced the works we read. We also came to under- stand how certain seminal texts influenced political or literary movements. In this way, we have been equipped with much more than merely a foundation in the grammar or vocabulary of the language.”

—Maríah Quinn (Spanish and Italian)

Winner of the Endowment for Excel- lence Award for Romance Languages and Literatures

“Sophomore year I was taking my first Dante class with Professor Moers. If you’ve taken class with him, you’ve probably seen him read a passage of Dante and start to choke up, maybe even shed a tear or two. When I saw that in class, I saw the passion Professor Moers had for Dante, and it made me real- ize that what’s important in life is that you pursue whatever it is that you feel kind of passion for. And I was coming to realize that Italian was what I felt passionate about, if per- haps to a slightly lesser degree than Professor Moers. It’s a career goal of mine to cry while reading Dante aloud in class. I think someday I’ll be able to get there in cantos XXX of the l’Purgatore’ when Dante turns to Virgil and he’s gone. That always gets to me.”

—Derrick Tests (Italian)

Winner of the Joseph Dalle Bonsu Award for Italian Studies

Hugo Verani, a member of the Iberian and Latin American Studies faculty since 2002, retired fol- lowing this past academic year and is now a guest research professor in the Depart- ment. Before coming to Notre Dame, Verani spent 28 years at the University of California, Davis, where he is an emeritus professor. His career has also included terms as a visitor at the University of the Americas, the National University of Mexico, the Octavio Paz Foundation, and UCLA. Last year, his commemora- tive edition of Octavio Paz’s Piedra de Sol was published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica. Verani is the author or editor of three forthcoming books, including two on Paz: the third edition of a critical bibli- ography on the Nobel Prize-winner’s work and a study of his poetry and poetics.

Approximately 70 percent of the Depart- ment’s majors who graduated in 2008 participated in a Notre Dame study abroad program in Brazil, Chile, France, Italy, Mexico, or Spain.
Montemaggi to Join Department in Fall 2009

Even though Vittorio Montemaggi won’t be joining the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures as an assistant professor until next fall, he already feels at home when he’s on the Notre Dame campus.

“I have visited Notre Dame three times so far,” he says, “and on all occasions have been struck, on both an academic and a personal level, by a wonderful combination of learning and friendship.”

His new colleagues are eager to welcome him into the fold.

“Vittorio Montemaggi is uniquely qualified to research and to teach at the interdisciplinary intersection between theology and literature,” says Theodore Cashy, professor of Italian and chairperson of Romance Languages and Literatures. “With interests that range from Dante to Primo Levi to Roberto Benigni, his appointment in our Department enhances an already stellar Italian Studies Program.”

Montemaggi earned his B.A. (theology and religious studies), M.Phil. (European literature), and Ph.D. (divinity) from the University of Cambridge, where he is currently a junior research fellow in Churchill College. He is co-editor of the forthcoming book Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry (University of Notre Dame Press), to which he is also contributing an essay based on his dissertation.

“My subject … is religion and literature, and the main author my work concentrates on is Dante,” Montemaggi says. “In relation to both of these, I find it difficult to think of an intellectual environment that might be more illuminating than that offered by Notre Dame.”