

PRE-PROPOSAL SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT ACTIVITIES

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES, PHILOSOPHY, AND SPEECH COMMUNICATION

1. Departmental profile

The Department of Languages, Philosophy, and Speech Communication employs 30 permanent faculty to teach in no less than eight completely distinct, non-overlapping fields of study. We offer five majors (along with corresponding minors): French, German, Spanish, Philosophy, and Speech Communication. We also offer five stand-alone minors: Chinese, Japanese, Linguistics, Portuguese, and Russian. And we have a Master's program in Second Language Teaching. All things considered, our department must be one of the most complex on campus!

Our teaching mission reflects this complexity. In **Languages**, our mission is threefold: to cultivate in our students the basic abilities of speaking, reading, and writing in a new language; to enrich their cultural knowledge of the world; and -- through cross-cultural contrasts -- to help them to appreciate the ways in which their own culture and language is unique. In **Philosophy**, our mission is to advance students' ability to analyze deep ideas critically and to increase their own self-understanding. In **Speech**, our mission is to improve students' communicative competencies in a variety of contexts, and to extend their theoretical understanding of human communication.

We accomplish these missions in a variety of ways. Some of us teach in an open-ended, Socratic manner; others adopt more traditional approaches; and still others make great use of the latest technologies to impart instruction. The only consistent common theme is this (as we have said before): we seek out heartfelt engagement and effective instruction with every student, and send them back out into a world that's bigger and more complex than any they had previously known.

And **it works!** Our students have gone on to graduate study at the most prestigious institutions in the world; they have become presidents of international corporations, and they have gained high-profile jobs in government. Eight of our faculty have been recognized as the College's Teacher of the Year, two have given "Last Lectures," and three have received the Robins Award as the University's Teacher of the Year. Two faculty have been awarded Advisor of the Year by the College, and *both* went on to receive the Robins Award as the University's Advisor of the Year. Four have been named "Top Professor" by the Mortar Board, and a dozen have been honored for teaching excellence by various other campus organizations. Our teaching evaluations are consistently above our College's and the University's averages.

2. Narrative of department-sponsored activities

Here is a quick, impressionistic sketch of some of the ways we engage our students. We have students learning Russian grammar, writing Japanese calligraphy, discussing medieval French literature (in French), analyzing cross-cultural differences in communication, designing communication studies, reading Nietzsche, building straw-

bale homes in Mexico, performing plays in German, thinking through ethical issues raised by biotechnology, giving public speeches, and helping to edit an online journal in Spanish. The list goes on, though we challenge anyone to imagine all the ways in which this list could be continued!

In addition to all the clubs one would expect (Spanish Club, Japanese club, etc.), our department also sponsors a range of study-abroad programs. Indeed, there are Study Abroad programs at USU **because** they were initiated by our faculty, who still take summer students to France, Germany, Spain, and Latin America. Over the summer, you will find our students sailing in Annecy, studying at the Goethe Institute in Freiburg, visiting cathedrals in Valparaiso, and appraising the art in Salamanca. We work hard to make these programs available to all -- whether that means a little extra personal reassurance and encouragement or fighting to keep the costs affordable.

Last spring our department inaugurated a Student Research Colloquium in which our students are encouraged to deliver their papers or research reports and discuss them with an audience. We combine this event with an awards banquet in which we honored our scholarship winners and outstanding faculty members. The event last spring was a terrific success, and we will continue this tradition.

3. Assessment and continual improvement

Each program is responsible for determining whether students in that program are developing the relevant skills. In the case of language programs, this determination is relatively straightforward in the lower division: students' abilities in reading, writing, speaking, and listening must be at a certain level before they can go on to the next course in the language sequence. Similarly, at the upper division, students face a sequence of courses aimed at providing them first with advanced skills in composition and conversation, then with general literary and cultural literacy, before admitting them to senior-level seminars in advanced topics. The Spanish section has developed an exit exam for its majors and minors in order to get precise feedback on how well our students are mastering the subject.

In the cases of philosophy and speech communication, programmatic assessments are not so straightforwardly built in to the curricula. But there is a clear progression from introductory courses to mid-level courses covering broad topics to advanced courses which target highly specialized material. Advisors meet with students to help them chart a reasonable path through our course offerings so that each student's skills will be built in such a way that our learning objectives will have been met. And we conduct exit interviews to get students' feedback on how to improve what we're doing.

Our department has offered a series of teaching workshops and brown-bag lectures so that we can make use of one another's talents and stay abreast of each others' research interests. These events provoke us all to think creatively about new approaches we may want to develop with our students.