

Department of Modern Languages and Cultures (MLAC)

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Summary of Reflection/Assessment Reports Submitted by Graduating Majors in Spring 2010.

Graduating majors in French, German and Spanish were asked to submit an assessment report of their experience in their respective programs at Albion College. Six graduating seniors in French, two graduating seniors in German, and five graduating seniors in Spanish responded to the call providing information about their intellectual and personal growth as well as the strengths of their individual program. Students were also asked to identify areas in which the program could improve. The following summary identifies comments that were made about the programs in MLAC that seemed to generalize the strengths and weaknesses across the entire department.

Respondents in all languages identified their improvement in communicating effectively in the target language as an important skill that they attained from their program. Our majors acquire the ability to communicate—orally and in writing—in casual, academic and professional contexts. They are able to converse and write about numerous topics in these contexts, and they have the ability to organize arguments and effectively express opinions in the target language. One French student comments: “When I reflect on my first year at Albion, I can say with certitude that I’ve improved. I find that it is no longer always necessary to translate between English and French when speaking or reading—it’s much more fluid and natural.” One German student commented: “Learning the language has allowed me to express myself in new and creative ways...”

In addition to linguistic knowledge, our seniors comment frequently on the value of the knowledge acquired concerning the cultures and literatures of the target countries. Through the breadth and depth of courses offered, our students in MLAC also gain an understanding of current issues regarding French, German and Spanish and the countries where those languages are spoken. The knowledge gained through the study of cultural phenomena (including cultural artifacts) help the students to gain a global perspective on our diverse world. A Spanish student describes her experience: “Con el departamento unido, la educación que recibí del programa español ha aumentado enormemente mi experiencia en Albion y mis capacidades para el “mundo real” afuera de Albion.”

One of the most commonly identified strengths of the our programs concerns the range and variety of coverage in courses taught. Students value the opportunity to learn about the many different areas of the French, German, and Spanish-speaking worlds afforded by the program through the wide

variety of courses offered. Students also appreciate that our faculty collectively have developed the expertise necessary to effectively cover a broad range of topics. Students in French, for example, frequently mention Africa, Louisiana, and Quebec, all topics covered by courses in our French program. Another common observation regards the overall quality of our faculty, commenting on the individualized attention given to each student by the professors in the program, and the fact that the professors are demanding and intelligent, but also human, understanding and approachable individuals who welcome and listen to student input. In German, one student comments: "I'm very happy that I have been given such a wonderful opportunity to learn under such wonderful and helpful instructors, ...". Seniors also point out the effectiveness of the approved off-campus study programs that compliment the instruction they receive at Albion College. A student in Spanish describes it simply: "Estudié en *La Universidad Juan Carlos III* en Madrid. Fue una experiencia inolvidable." Students also frequently praise the helpful and hard-working Native Speaker Teaching Assistants, and the usefulness of certain co- and extra-curricular activities linked to their programs like conversation tables, tutorials, weekly cultural activities, and residence in the International House (now called I-Space).

Notably, most of the issues of concern for the students are also identified as areas of strength. Take the I-House/I-Space program, for example. Both of this year's seniors in German, for example, lived in the Gerstacker International House before the program was moved to the Whitehouse residence hall. These seniors shared the same comment about the Whitehouse I-Space such as the need to improve the living space of the program in order to attract students and facilitate the linguistic, cultural and community-building experience that is the purpose of the I-Space program. Another issue of concern is the lack of financial assistance for off-campus study programs. While the programs themselves provide spectacular experiences for the students, the extra cost for the students is prohibitive, despite the efforts of the MLAC department and the Center of International Education to mitigate some of the expenses. Another issue concerns the NSTAs themselves. Graduating seniors praise the opportunity to work with them, but also lament the fact that due to resource issues, they are not able to work with them more significantly beyond the level of 302, which is the final intermediate language class.