

Academic Senate Undergraduate Council  
Undergraduate Program Review  
Italian Studies Program

June 3, 2014

### **Introduction**

This report on the Italian Studies Program (ISP) is the first since CEP's 1998-99 review. That review found ISP to be a small but sound program, stretched thin by a small core faculty and hampered by competing approaches to language instruction in Linguistics (for the first year) and Literature (for the second). After meeting with faculty, staff, and students, and reviewing written materials, the present committee finds the ISP still small and sound, culturally engaged in the community, but still stretched thin and even more hampered by the campus's poorly coordinated language instruction. Our report mainly offers modest steps that could be taken to strengthen student demand, and it reemphasizes the need to reorganize language instruction in light of numerous difficulties with UCSD's approach and in view of successful examples offered by other UC Italian Studies programs.

### **Program Requirements**

Italian Studies is a small program, averaging 1-2 majors per year since the last review. Majors complete two years of Italian language training and twelve upper division courses chosen from a menu of classes in Literature, History, Visual Arts, and Music. They are also strongly encouraged to study in Italy through EAP -- EAP offers quarter and semester-long programs at the UCEAP Centers in Florence and Rome, and semester and year-long full-immersion opportunities in Bologna -- and to use courses taken abroad for their major. The menu of classes offered at UCSD is not a large one, but there are no specific required courses that might create bottlenecks, and there is no indication that students face difficulties completing their degrees on time.

It is easy to imagine that, five years from now, faculty retirements will make it much harder to sustain the program. Program Directors should investigate any opportunities to partner with larger departments to win new FTE. Given the size of the program, however, they will more likely be in the position of exercising constant vigilance for new faculty around the campus who could contribute courses to the program.

### **Advising and Administration**

Italian Studies' academic home is in Literature and its administrative home is under the Committee on Area and Ethnic Studies and Research Programs (CAESAR). CAESAR staff were extremely knowledgeable, energetic, and strongly supportive, even though a rather small fraction of their time is taken up by Italian Studies. They noted that the physical separation of staff and faculty advisers can be frustrating for students, who get shuffled between the Literature and HSS buildings depending on their specific questions. That physical and administrative separation also created some problems of coordination between program directors and advisors. For example, the latter might not be aware of upcoming campus or community events arranged by the program

director, to which they could have helped draw the attention of students. More inclusive email lists and occasional meetings between staff and program director (especially if new to her or his job) would help. Some modest infusion of resources for staff, particularly to assist with enhancing and updating the program web site, would also improve information to students.

Academic responsibility for the ISP rests with a Program Director. The position has alternated between Professors Stephanie Jed and Pasquale Verdicchio (the current Director) from Literature. They have done yeoman service, and not only in teaching classes, advising students, and taking various steps to raise student awareness of the program. Despite extremely limited resources, they have also organized campus and local events that showcase cutting-edge expressions of contemporary Italian culture that benefit a broader range of students, faculty, and community members. It does not appear that affiliated faculty have much involvement in the program beyond their (indispensable) course offerings. A yearly lunch meeting at the faculty club, ideally open to majors and minors as well, might strengthen the program's sense of community and generate new ideas.

We also noted some minor glitches in the catalog that should be fixed. The reference to the long-defunct first-year Italian language study offered in Literature (LTIT 1A-B-C) should be deleted; it should be clarified whether LTIT 115, Medieval Studies, is required (as indicated on the WASC materials) or strongly recommended to students as "central for all Italian Studies majors"; references should be deleted to EAP programs that have been discontinued; a description of LTITA 50 should be added; and Pasquale Verdicchio's department affiliation should be corrected.

### **Publicizing the Program**

As noted, Italian Studies has very few majors and minors. For the most part, that reflects campus and national trends, including a long-term decline in student interest in European languages and what we hope is a shorter-term decline in student interest in fields perceived to be of lesser practical value for getting well-paid jobs. Italian Studies can do little to reverse these trends. There were, however, a variety of good ideas -- from faculty, staff, and students -- for increasing the visibility of the program:

- target community college students in related courses to increase the odds that they will declare the major when they transfer;
- offer broadly appealing freshman seminars and large enrollment upper division classes that might pique student interest in the program, such as on the mafia, Italian cuisine, Italian film, or Italian immigration;
- create a "Special Topics in Italian Studies" course that students could repeat if topics vary, thus avoiding the proliferation of petitioned courses and improving the curriculum's stable offerings;

- enlist the handful of Italian Studies majors and minors as peer advisers. At UC Davis, for example, the Academic Peer Adviser position is funded by the Dean's Office and a specific department. In general, there is one APA per major. The APA works closely with faculty and staff advisers to advertise the major and organize outreach events on campus. Our representative from UC Davis's program notes that the APA has been very helpful with freshmen recruitment;
- make the results of language placement examinations available to program advisers so they can reach out to Italian language students;
- make the case to college advisers, such as through the Undergraduate Academic Advising Council, that continued study of a second language is both a valuable cultural skill and training that enhances the academic profile of future graduate school and job applicants], not a distraction from the serious business of getting a degree in a timely fashion;
- make sure that students headed to Italy for EAP are informed about the ISP;
- identify students from Italy who are studying here and invite them to program activities, thus enriching the Italian Studies community at UCSD;
- tag courses in the catalog, on TritonLink, and/or on WebReg as meeting Italian Studies (among others) requirements, thus calling wider attention to the program;
- ensure that notices about Italian Studies events are distributed widely, e.g., to CAESAR advisers and to instructors in the Linguistics 1A-B-C sequence.

## **Language Instruction**

Italian Studies requires two years of language study. As in the case of Spanish, French, and German at UCSD, elementary (first year) Italian is taught in the Linguistics Language Program (LLP) and intermediate (second year) Italian is taught in the Literature Department. For a few years early in the current review period (around 2000) the Literature Department offered an alternative first-year sequence (as noted above, LTIT 1A-B-C is still listed in the catalog but should be deleted, as it has not been taught for more than a decade). In 2009, the LLP added a fourth quarter to its elementary Italian sequence. This new course, LIIT1D, competes directly with LTIT2A: both are fourth-quarter Italian classes, but LIIT1D is designed as the fourth and final quarter of the LLP sequence, whereas LTIT2A is the first quarter of the Literature Department's second-year sequence.

ISP representatives strongly criticized this approach, and for reasons with which our committee agrees. The presence of two courses for the same quarter of language instruction may cause needless confusion among the students. Because teaching methodologies between the two sequences vary significantly, students who elect to complete 1D are often poorly prepared for the demands of 2B, should they continue to a fifth quarter of Italian language instruction. Most students who take Italian 1D do not move on, however, as the course allows them to complete the 4-quarter language requirement of Revelle and Roosevelt Colleges. Statistics provided the

review committee by the director of the LLP show that the introduction of 1D has cut enrollments in 2A by half in the five years since it was introduced. Because the Literature Department's 2A is a gateway to the Italian Studies program, the terminal LLIT1A-D sequence also may contribute to the low numbers of Italian Studies majors and minors. Finally, the overlap between LIIT 1D and LTIT2A confused the normal progression from first to second year language studies, a progression that is the norm in most universities. By contrast, the strongest Italian Studies departments and programs, i.e. UCLA, UCB, UCSB and UCD, are in charge of administering and staffing the entire Italian language curriculum. Student interaction with Italian Studies core and affiliated faculty early on is a crucial factor of motivation and inspiration. We cannot expect this positive impact on undergraduate students from occasional Teaching Assistants who, in the best case scenario, are proficient in the target language, yet are not invested in the cultural mission of the Italian Studies Program.

These are all familiar issues, applicable beyond Italian Studies, and criticisms like those raised here have been made before -- to no effect. It seems clear that Linguistics and Literature are unable to reach agreement between themselves. In the interests of a clear division of labor between first and second year language study and between technical language skills and language training that is part of a larger education in cultural literacy, we urge that the issue be taken up by the Humanities and Social Sciences deans for closer study and authoritative resolution.

## **Conclusion**

Whatever concerns there may be about the sustainability of Italian Studies in the long term, it is currently a well-run program, from the quality of its courses through the advising of its students to its commendable community outreach. It is also a very small program, and our first major recommendation consists of possible measures to improve the lure of Italian Studies among students and prospective students. Our second recommendation is that the Humanities and Social Sciences deans address the problem of language study on campus and devise a pedagogically sound division of labor between Linguistics and Literature to take the place of the current, dysfunctional one.

Professor Margherita Heyer-Caput, Department of French and Italian, UC Davis

Professor Todd Kontje, Department of Literature, UC San Diego

Professor Jeffrey Haydu, Department of Sociology, UC San Diego (program review chair)

August 28, 2014

**PROFESSOR Pasquale Verdicchio, Director  
Italian Studies Program**

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Italian Studies Program

Dear Professor Verdicchio,

The Undergraduate Council has discussed the Italian Studies Program's 2014 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee. In addition, we would like to comment on the following:

- **Affiliated Faculty:** It was reported that the Program previously reached out to affiliated faculty and brought them together for lunches and meetings. It was also reported that affiliated faculty may not be aware of the goings on of the Italian Studies Program and thus cannot successfully inform their students of events and opportunities. The Council would like to see increased communication to the affiliated faculty, either in person, via electronic methods, or both.
- **Communication between the Director and Staff:** The Council requests the Program Director create a communication plan with the support staff. It is essential that the support staff be able to consult with the director about issues related to the Program and be kept current on any information germane to the Program. Much like the affiliated faculty, the support staff cannot be effective in advising and recruiting students if they are not aware of what is occurring in the Program.
- **Language Instruction:** The Council was struck by the continued discord between the Departments of Linguistics and Literature in terms of fourth quarter language instruction and the confusion that this may cause to students. To have two departments teaching nearly identical sequential courses is problematic. The Council urges the Program to request that the Deans of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences reopen the discussion on the fourth quarter of language instruction and come to an agreement on how it should be structured.

The Undergraduate Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Program during or after Fall Quarter 2015. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Program's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Program for its engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,



James Nieh, Chair  
Undergraduate Council

cc: G. Boss L. Carver C. Della Coletta K. Pogliano R. Rodriguez B. Sawrey M. Sidney