Lauren B. Adamson, Dean  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  

December 11, 2008  

Dear Dean Adamson:

It is with great pleasure that I submit to you the Self-Study Report of the Department of Applied Linguistics & ESL. I would like to acknowledge the self-study committee for their excellent work, and in particular, Dr. John Murphy for his leadership in the self-study process. Other members of the committee included Dr. Diane Belcher, Ms. Cheryl Delk, and Ms. Sharon Cavusgil. I have read the enclosed document carefully and concur with its assessment of the Department’s strengths and weaknesses and with the goals we have set for ourselves.

As the self-study clearly shows, the Department has been through several major transitions since our last program review, with the addition of both a BA program and a PhD program, the retirements of several senior faculty members, strategic new hires, and a new Chair. In this letter I would like to highlight a few of the main findings of the self-study in light of these transitions.

One of the Department’s main strengths is the quality of its faculty. Our faculty, whether they teach in our degree programs, ESL courses for matriculated students, or in our Intensive English Program, are uniformly dedicated to excellence in instruction and committed to furthering their development as teachers. Several faculty members have been successful in attracting internal and external funding for research projects and have taken on highly visible roles in the profession.

Another strength of the Department is its involvement with interdisciplinary and international programs. We have obtained funding for international initiatives such as the North American Mobility Grant for graduate exchanges with universities in Canada and Mexico, we participate in exchanges with universities in Turkey and China, and our Masters International Peace Corps program continues to attract highly qualified MA students. We are involved in several initiatives with other departments and colleges, including the major area of focus on Language and Literacy.

Some challenges that the Department continues to face include the following:

We have expanded our degree programs and credit hour production with no increase in faculty. At the time of our last program review we had 10 tenure-track faculty and received action plan commitments of three additional faculty members. However, due to retirements and resignations we currently have only 8 tenure-track faculty members, one of whom has a half-time appointment in the Dean’s office. We have been relying on visiting faculty, part-time instructors, and graduate students to...
teach many of our courses; other initiatives that we would like to become more involved in (for example, additional international programs, community-based research projects) have not been possible because of the additional advising and departmental service roles that need to be shared among fewer people. We are grateful that in the current economic climate we are able to go ahead with searches for replacement faculty and hope that when the situation improves we will be able to expand the faculty further.

Similarly, despite the addition of a PhD program in Applied Linguistics, the level of support from the College for graduate research and teaching assistantships has remained constant. Most of our PhD students are supported through teaching assistantships in the IEP. While we are certainly fortunate to have this source of funding for our students there are certain disadvantages to relying on the IEP. First, the IEP is not a stable source of assistantships as enrollment is highly dependent upon external factors such as worldwide political and economic developments. Second, as a revenue-generating program, the IEP depends on the excellence of its instructors to compete in the local market, which places some constraints on the students who can be funded through the IEP. Third, the structure of the IEP is such that doctoral students cannot teach multiple sections of the same course; most of these students teach three to four different preparations every year. Finally, the IEP only funds teaching assistantships and not research assistantships, making it difficult for students to gain both teaching and research experience as part of their program.

The need to attract highly qualified doctoral students through assistantships has meant that we have had to reduce the number of assistantships given to MA students. The MA program has long been the largest program in the Department; we believe that part of the recent decline in enrollments of MA students is due to the fact that we cannot support full-time students to the extent that we once did.

The Department is becoming better known nationally and internationally, as evidenced by the increasing number of applicants to our doctoral program. However, we recognize that the addition of a PhD program brings with it increased expectations for research, and as a Department we have set several ambitious goals to further enhance our reputation for scholarship. One of these goals is to double the amount of external funding in the Department over the next three to five years. Another is to increase the number of refereed journal articles published each year. We believe that we are in a position to become one of the premier Applied Linguistics programs in the country and we are committed to taking actions that will move us towards this goal.

I look forward to your response to our self-study and thank you for your continued support of the Department.

Sincerely,

Sara Cushing Weigle
Chair, Applied Linguistics & ESL