



University of Colorado **Boulder**

2025 Program Review

Department of Spanish and
Portuguese

Academic Review and Planning
Advisory Committee Report

Approved

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Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs | Date

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Process Overview

The Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC) review of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese (SPAN) was conducted in accordance with the 2025 program review guidelines. The degree program report and goal setting exercise were prepared and submitted by the unit. An external review committee (ERC), consisting of two experts from outside of the University of Colorado Boulder, engaged in a virtual visit and submitted a report based upon review of relevant documents and interviews with faculty, staff, and student unit members and university administrators. ARPAC staff, employing web conferencing tools, facilitated the external review as a remote visit over April 10 and 11, 2025. The ARPAC unit liaisons submitted a summary of findings derived from the goal setting exercise. ARPAC reviewed and considered these materials, met with the chair, and wrote this report.

Past Reviews

The last ARPAC review was in 2016. In addition to noting the many strengths of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, that review highlighted significant climate issues among faculty that included problems with collegiality and equity issues related to gender and hierarchy. The review also cited a large 30% decline in enrollment over the previous 5-year period as well. Issues related to graduate student advising and mentoring were also cited as challenges to the department, among others. Both follow-up reports and the ERC report highlight improvements to collegiality and climate, with joint commitment to improve conditions in the unit. In addition, course offerings, extracurricular activities, and faculty expertise have all been strengthened for heritage speakers in Spanish, as had been recommended in the previous ARPAC report. The department undertook significant actions to improve advising and mentoring, principally through a more expansive and supportive orientation process. The department is to be commended for each of these steps. Enrollment declines remain an issue for the department, as do the safety and adequacy of facilities for the department. The ERC notes persistent issues with advising, linked to the advisor assigned to the department having too many commitments; SPAN contests this characterization, naming these issues as systemic.

Unit Analysis

The campus' standardized description of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese is available on the website of the Office of Data & Analytics (D&A) at <https://www.colorado.edu/oda/institutional-research/institutional-level-data/information-department/academic-review-and-planning>. D&A updates the profile annually in the fall semester. This report cites data posted in October 2024, reflecting the state of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese as of the academic year 2023-2024.

Additional data was obtained from the unit's website at <https://www.colorado.edu/spanishportuguese/>

Teaching and Learning Excellence and Assessment

The Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Spanish and Portuguese has three tracks: Spanish Language and Literature, International Spanish for the Professions, and Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures as well as minors in Spanish and Portuguese. The minor offered by the department is

aimed at helping students gain an understanding of the Portuguese and or Spanish languages, as well as a grasp of main cultural concepts, practices, and current literary and cultural trends. A Service-Learning program gives students the opportunity to use and strengthen their Spanish skills while engaging with Hispanic cultures in real-world settings, while also supporting local schools and community agencies through tutoring and volunteer activities. It entails roughly 20 hours of volunteer work during the semester, usually 2 hours of service per week for 10 weeks. In addition to majors, the department offers multiple introductory courses in Spanish and Portuguese language instruction to approximately 1,700 students per semester through 7 coordinated courses offered at the first, second, and third years of Spanish and Portuguese language study, plus an intensive second-year course, which make up more than 90% of total student credit hours (SCH) taken in the department.

The Master of Arts (MA) aims to prepare graduates with comprehensive knowledge of Iberian, Latin American, and Latine literary, cultural, and linguistic studies, equipping them with the standards and qualifications to succeed in academia, professional humanistic fields beyond academia, and further study in Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs.

SPAN also offers a PhD in Spanish with three different areas of emphasis: Medieval and Early Modern Hispanic Literatures, Peninsular Literature, and Latin American Literature. The PhD prepares graduates with near-native proficiency in English, Spanish, and/or Portuguese to conduct advanced research and professional communication, produce high-quality scholarship in Spanish and Portuguese studies, and excel as skilled educators and professionals in academia, teaching, publishing, translation, and non-government organizations (NGOs).

The unit plans to strengthen the BA in Spanish by clarifying pathways from the minor to the major, aligning the curriculum with the new Common Curriculum, expanding courses taught in English, developing a new certificate in Hispanic and Lusophone Studies for students without advanced language proficiency, and increasing double-listed (4xxx/5xxx) courses to foster undergraduate–graduate exchange. Long term, it also wants to submit more classes for general education credit and to improve intradepartmental consistency across offerings. At the MA level, the program intends to introduce online and part-time options tailored for high school teachers toward a master’s degree, expand cooperation with kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12) institutions through internships and outreach, and streamline pathways into the PhD program while potentially raising admission caps. Graduate training will also grow to include Spanish for the Professions, building on the department’s nationally recognized undergraduate program, and expanded cross-listed seminars with other departments will deepen interdisciplinary study. For the PhD program, planned changes emphasize adapting advising to include both academic and non-academic career paths, strengthening alumni networks, and leveraging campus-wide collaborations to broaden professional and scholarly opportunities.

The department has developed Learning Outcome Assessment Plans for its programs as of November 2024. In addition, SPAN has updated its language program from the first- through fifth-semester courses (1010–3000) to align with current ACTFL proficiency guidelines and project-based (more performance-oriented) assessments. Its next step is to support faculty in incorporating regular, targeted oral proficiency and project-based assessments across the program, with a culminating assessment for all majors. Appendix C submitted indicates there are regular “spot checks” for oral proficiency.

A strength of Spanish and Portuguese is the large and varied number of offerings for non-majors in the field. This includes opportunities for broad exposure to language, literature, and culture, as well as in-depth language instruction. Another strength is the partnerships with community organizations maintained, for example, through the Student Internship Program and Study Abroad. The graduate programs have a strong record of job placement in a challenging environment, including outside academia.

The ERC notes that the “assignment of courses seems inefficient and delayed, with cascading negative effects” and recommends stronger early planning processes for assigning courses a year ahead of time. Further, several shifts to teaching could help reduce declines in enrollment. For example, revising course offerings and titles could help with the goal of satisfying general education requirements and attracting students. The ERC further recommended online courses for Portuguese that would allow other campuses and institutions to join.

The materials submitted with the assessment Appendix include some guidelines that were last updated in 1994. It is not clear how well aligned these are with the department’s current programs or with current understandings of how students learn and how to assess student learning, as significant advances in the latter have been made since these were last updated. The exclusive reliance on traditional grades is one area of misalignment with research. In addition, ARPAC is concerned that the department has not engaged with how artificial intelligence (AI) may both disrupt and offer new opportunities for assessment of students’ language skills. ARPAC appreciates the desire to incorporate adjustments to placements for both heritage speakers and those who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy and suggests that these adjustments should be made as soon as possible, to help make the minor and major more attractive to students.

Research, Scholarly, and/or Creative Work Excellence

In 2024, the department ranked first of the units in its own review cycle for refereed books and monographs (0.9-fourth of all units) and for edited books (0.7). This means that almost every tenured/tenure-track (TTT) faculty has published a refereed book within a period of 7 years. For a book-discipline such as Spanish and Portuguese, this is an impressive outcome and corresponds to the self-assessment of the unit in their goal setting exercise where they state that the identity of the department is not accurately described as a “foreign languages” department. The unit defines itself by its scholarship and research focus emphasizing the unit’s mission that stresses intercultural literary, critical thinking, and rigorous academic training. The ERC confirmed that the department maintains a high scholarly profile in the profession, both in linguistics and literature/cultural studies, in both Spanish and Portuguese. The faculty maintains a strong record of publications that help shape the field in innovative and interdisciplinary directions.

The faculty in Spanish and Portuguese specializes in the languages, literatures, and cultures of Latin America, U.S. Latine population, Iberia and Portuguese-Speaking Africa. Current faculty in the department received prestigious internal awards such as the Kayden Book Award and the Provost’s Faculty Achievement Award.

While the scholarly output of the faculty is impressive, the department sees a need to better advertise and showcase its strengths in research and scholarship, and to tie its scholarly expertise to its pedagogical mission. In their goal setting exercise, the department aims to better articulate how their research and creative work enrich their collective vision and mission, and they suggest undertaking a collective project to map out intersections between scholarship and teaching. To

maintain a high scholarly profile, the department suggests utilizing their grants committee effectively to assist faculty in the process of securing funding from internal and external sources. Faculty members are encouraged to incorporate group research practices into their graduate and undergraduate courses. Given the prevalent crisis of the Humanities in general, the unit also sees a need for engaging in interdepartmental scholarly dialogue and for developing joint interdisciplinary initiatives.

Hiring and Mentoring (Faculty, Staff, Postdoctoral Fellows)

According to the D&A profile for AY 2022-2023, faculty personnel in Spanish and Portuguese consisted of: 12 tenured and tenure-track (TTT) faculty, 9 teaching-track faculty, and 4 lecturers. As of October 2025, the department lists 11 TTT faculty and 8 teaching professors. The website of the department lists 11 lecturers, a significant increase from 2023.

Faculty salaries in Spanish and Portuguese are way below the standard compared to the Association of American Universities (AAU) peers for full professors, who made 71% of the average AAU peer salary as of 2022. Compression seems to be a major reason for this discrepancy as associate professors and assistant professors in the unit were much closer to the average salary of their AAU peers (90% for associate professors; 98% for assistant professors).

According to the Office of Data & Analytics (D&A) profile for AY 2022-2023, staff personnel in Spanish and Portuguese consisted of: 1 classified staff member and 4 student hourly employees. As of October 2025, the department website lists 2 classified staff members.

Student Success and Mentoring (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

In the most recent profile (November 2024), there were 70 students enrolled in the major, and 430 in the minor (425 in Spanish and 5 in Portuguese). The number of majors has declined since 2020 ($n = 106$), and were in decline prior to 2020, according to the previous ARPAC report.

The number of student credit hours (SCH) in 2024 was 10,934, and 94% were taken by non-majors, an exceptionally high percentage. This represents strong service to the university. This number of credit hours is down from 2020 by roughly 10 percent. The department chair reports that there is greater demand for courses than can be met with instructors, with waiting lists for many sections each semester.

The percentage of SCH that was taught by TTT faculty was 18%; by teaching-track faculty or lecturers was 35%; and the percentage taught by teaching assistants (TA)/graduate part-time instructors (GPTIs) was 29%.

There is a two-course sequence as well for Heritage Spanish speakers that helps expand opportunities for students whose first language is Spanish.

Students pursuing departmental honors in Spanish and Portuguese must complete a faculty-supervised research thesis grounded in primary sources, informed by relevant secondary scholarship, and presented with proper scholarly documentation. While enrollment in the Honors Thesis course (SPAN 4990) is optional and does not count toward the major, the completed thesis is typically 30–50 pages and subject to faculty evaluation. The Spanish and Portuguese degree

program report does not provide information on the percentage who participate or change in the past five years.

There is a significant internship program described above that offers volunteer and practice experience in the community, and there are study abroad programs coordinated by the department (Global Seminar) in Barcelona, Catalonia, Rosaria, Argentina, and Lisbon, Portugal. La Mesa de Español (Spanish Conversation Table) offers Spanish conversation practice roughly every two weeks in an open format. The department allows students to earn a Latine/x Cultural and Scholarly Engagement Recognition Badge by actively engaging in campus events related to Latine/x culture in the U.S.

In 2016, ARPAC noted that SPAN needed to develop a way to track placements, though no follow-up reports addressed the completion of this recommendation for undergraduates.

A strength with respect to student success is the median time to degree, 3.67 years, best among 48 units to which it was compared, according to the unit profile for 2023-2024. According to the ERC, there are many minors, and there is a high demand for students in the language program. In addition, the service-learning program helps students connect with the community. Similarly, there is a wide array of extracurricular activities for creating community and for engaging Latine students, as the ERC points out.

The greatest need is to address the declining number of majors and in advising, where students face a delay in continuing language study in ways that inhibit students from meeting their goals for staying on track. This is particularly concerning for advanced Spanish heritage language students. ARPAC recommends developing online tools for helping students track progress toward their degree, as well as incorporating the use of such a tool into a more formal advising routine for majors and prospective majors. ARPAC agrees with the department's suggestion that it should strengthen its experiential and individual mentoring opportunities and recognize the Seal of Biliteracy. Needed as well are more refined placement and exemption exams, as the unit notes.

In the most recent profile (November 2024), SPAN had 10 students enrolled in its master's programs and six in its doctoral program. For both programs, this represents a small decrease since 2020. Three master's degrees were awarded, down from 7 in 2020; one doctoral degree was awarded, down from 9 in 2020. The number of doctoral degrees awarded has been 0-2 for the past three years.

The department reports that the primary way graduate students gain relevant teaching experience is teaching assistantships. They report that students have opportunities to learn about research methods primarily through coursework. Its students present their research at regional and national conferences and publish consistently towards the end of their degree, according to the department. There is a small stipend available for travel to conferences, though it is unlikely to cover the full cost of travel.

No student organizations in Spanish were noted in the materials submitted by the unit, on their department website, or in the external review report. The unit's own report of goals indicates a desire to strengthen community among graduate students.

The unit provided documents (degree program report and goal setting exercise) assert there is strong placement of graduates of the graduate program, who have found employment as English

as a Second Language (ESL) instructors, lecturers, high school teachers, legal aid leaders, and interpreters. Some, too, are employed at corporations.

The unit appears to have had too few graduate students to report out survey results regarding their satisfaction with the program.

The program's strengths include a strong onboarding process for graduate students and faculty interest in building a more cohesive graduate community with stronger professional preparation. Weaknesses lie in declining enrollment, fragmented advising structures, and a separation of MA and PhD admissions that may limit program growth. Opportunities include revising admissions processes, expanding cross-listed courses with advanced undergraduates, introducing a proseminar for professionalization, fostering broader career pathways and advising to support it, and exploring alternatives to traditional theses and dissertations to better meet diverse student needs.

Inclusivity and Unit Culture

In February 2022, a collaborative group met and identified the following [five goals to advance diversity, equity and inclusion](#) at CU Boulder: (1) employee skills and development; (2) student achievement outcomes; (3) community building; (4) employee recruitment outcomes; and (5) preparing students to participate in a diverse democracy.

The ERC notes that the climate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese seems positive, and that recent hires are strong and well-integrated in the unit's culture. The ERC further elaborates that the department is eager and active with helping to make the campus more welcoming for the growing Latine population in Colorado by providing curricular offerings as well as community building opportunities. At the same time, the ERC notices the challenge of low morale among faculty due to a lack of resources. Some suggestions by the ERC seem to point to administrative labor in the department often being disproportionately distributed among faculty and often landing on pre-tenured and underrepresented faculty. The goal setting exercise has identified this as an area that needs to be addressed when noting that it must be ensured that all faculty members are appointed to a variety of committees, "as appropriate", and to increase involvement of senior faculty in governance at levels higher than the unit. To regularly assess advances and challenges, the department has begun to organize faculty retreats around clearly defined items and facilitated by experts. There has been consensus among all faculty to hold such retreats regularly and make them a feature of the unit's academic and administrative life.

The department is aware of the need to review and update bylaws to get in line with recent college requirements and to make sure to implement an inclusive governance that includes all constituencies in the department in the decision-making process. On the level of unit culture, the department suggests using discretionary resources to support efforts to strengthen ties between faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The goal setting exercise suggests several initiatives that emphasize scholarly and social exchange among different student groups as well as faculty (classroom visits, social events, co-hosted events in McKenna, extracurricular student groups). The department already organizes important and successful events for community building in collaboration with the library, the museum and other departments such as Hispanic Heritage, Heroic Legacies, Celebrating Indigenous Creative Works etc.

Academically, the program has done a great job to become more inclusive and strive for inclusive excellence. As the ERC notes, the Heritage speaker program was successfully initiated a few years ago and could potentially develop further, including 3000 level and upper division courses.

Unit Planning and Governance Structures and Processes

The unit bylaws were last updated in 2012. They include many of the required elements of unit bylaws (governance, voting rights, faculty evaluation, promotion/tenure processes, committees, and mentoring). However, some required elements (e.g., grievance for students, mentoring of non-tenured faculty) are incomplete or delegated to other university policies rather than spelled out locally.

The delineation of voting rights is clear and includes differentiated voting rights for tenure-track and teaching-track faculty (though the previous ARPAC report raised questions about rights for instructors (now teaching-track faculty)). The bylaws outline faculty hiring procedures, annual merit review standards and procedures, and reappointment, promotion, and tenure criteria and procedures. These are in alignment with Regent policies. The merit review process includes how salary merit will be distributed; it does not address situations where pay equity must be addressed in accordance with law. In addition, the rule that faculty may suggest how service might best be evaluated is not in alignment with ARPAC's previous recommendations that each member of the faculty contributes service to the college and/or university. The mentoring component appears stronger for TTT faculty than other faculty. There are minimal procedures outlined for grievance procedures, though the process that the department undertook for self-review of climate may have lessons for how to revise these. Only grievances related to grade appeals are specified.

The department has several governing positions and bodies. The chair oversees administration, budgets, hiring, teaching assignments, and evaluations. They have a 4-year renewable term for no more than two terms. There are two associate chairs appointed by the chair, one for undergraduate studies and one for graduate studies. An Executive Committee is elected from among each rank group and advises on hiring, merit review, grievances, and other personnel issues. Several committees handle different aspects of departmental governance: the Graduate Committee, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Grade Appeals Committee, and the Study Abroad Committee. The department relies on voting membership as defined in bylaws; most major decisions (hiring, curriculum changes, promotions) require faculty votes. Students do not have a clear say in governance.

The unit bylaws have many required elements but need to be updated to be in line with current college requirements. The ERC recommends rethinking the current committee structure and redistributing responsibility more broadly, and not principally with the chair or associate chairs, to promote a more equitable distribution of volunteer labor. Ensuring that all faculty members are proactive in volunteering on college- and campus-level committees is key, and these could be reflected in revised bylaws. Engaging faculty in annual retreats, as proposed by the department, is recommended, as is finding additional roles for students in assessing advances and challenges and proposing solutions to those challenges.

Recommendations

The members of the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee address the following recommendations to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and to the offices of responsible administrators:

To the Unit:

1. Collaborate with the dean and other relevant departments to develop structural solutions to the challenges for graduate programs so that students can have teaching opportunities rather than lecturers, even though lecturers are more cost-effective (for example, create new tracks that can attract new students to the program that is not limited to Spanish and Portuguese but that would give them opportunities to attract students who could teach in the language program. This could include identifying other Spanish- or Portuguese-fluent students who could teach classes within the department.
2. Develop a plan to revise the way that faculty and instructors are assigned to courses. The ERC suggested one possible path, where the chair initiates the process of assigning faculty and instructors to courses by inviting faculty to propose courses for the entire academic year in December. The chair would then evaluate all proposals, consider the needs of the department, and decide on appropriate courses for each faculty member.
3. Encourage senior faculty to engage in more service, both within the department and campus-level, which can help with equity concerns and with identifying collaborators across campus for meeting challenges faced by the department.
4. Revise and significantly update the bylaws. Especially focus on expanding grievance procedures for students beyond a focus on grades. Consider including using the executive committee to examine and seek to address issues of salary compression impacting full professors in particular.
5. Consider finding additional roles for students in assessing advances and challenges and proposing solutions to those challenges related to planning for teaching assignments within the department. This could include offering students a say in governance as part of the bylaws revisions suggested in recommendation #4 above.
6. Improve and coordinate student advising to help students who are in the major stay on track in their program.

To the Dean of the Arts and Humanities:

7. Consider strategies for making research contributions of the department more visible (including through public communications), both within the Division and across the college and university.
8. Work with the language and literature departments to address the need for a cohort of graduate students across departments that can support needed teaching in multiple departments at the same time.
9. Consider a consolidated departmental/administrative structure for languages or groups of languages that would allow for consolidated administrative support while also retaining successful degree programs and minors and maintaining strategic strengths in discrete areas of research, scholarship, and pedagogical excellence.

10. Continue efforts to advocate for an Arts & Humanities budget process that accounts for units' high share of student credit hours (SCH) from non-majors and develop a plan to robustly account for and reward these SCH, recognizing units' significant educational contributions. Under the current budget model, there are concerns that SPAN will not be allocated appropriate resources for the courses taught/students served.

11. Emphasize and support the important role that SPAN—and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

To the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences:

12. Develop online tools in the College to help students track progress toward their degree in different tracks and incorporate the use of such a tool into a more formal advising routine for majors and prospective majors.

To the Provost:

13. Support the dean in developing a mechanism to allocate sufficient resources for teaching to meet student demand and to robustly account for and reward non-major student credit hours, recognizing the department's significant educational contributions. Under the current budget model, there are concerns that SPAN will not be allocated appropriate resources for the courses taught/students served.

14. Emphasize and support the important role that SPAN—and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

Required Follow-up

The chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese shall submit two follow-up reports—one due on the first of April 2027 and one due on the first of April 2029. The follow-up reports shall focus on the implementation of the recommendations from ARPAC detailed herein. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the provost and other relevant central campus leadership will also respond to all outstanding matters under their purview arising from this review year's recommendations. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences will submit one follow-up report due on May 1, 2028, while the provost and relevant central campus leaders will submit one follow-up report due on June 1, 2030.