

University Senate

Proposed: March 5, 2010

Adopted: March 5, 2010

without dissent

**RESOLUTION TO CHANGE THE NAME OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE
TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN AND IBERIAN CULTURES**

WHEREAS the Department of Spanish and Portuguese has expanded its curriculum and faculty to include the study of the larger cultures of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, and

WHEREAS the department has decreased its emphasis on the teaching of literature and broadened its activities well beyond the closed order of literature study, and

WHEREAS the department has rethought its language, undergraduate and graduate curricula and has added more languages which are taught by a well-trained, professionalized faculty to its offerings, and

WHEREAS there is an increasing demand on the part of students for cultural studies in place of literature,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the name of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese be changed to the Department of Latin American and Iberian Cultures.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be forwarded to the Trustees for their approval.

Proponent: Education Committee

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Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Columbia University
Casa Hispánica
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Proposal for a Departmental Change of Name

In a meeting that took place on October 13, 2009, the faculty of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese voted unanimously to change its name to DEPARTMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN AND IBERIAN CULTURES.

The proposed name modification reflects both changes in our department's understanding of its undertaking as well as in the discipline at large. To begin with, "Spanish and Portuguese" no longer reflects the languages studied in our department, since we currently teach a full complement of courses in Catalan as well as beginning Nahuatl. Furthermore, the label harks back to an outmoded philological organization of our disciplines, in which language was the principal category invoked to differentiate and set boundaries for our academic and intellectual work.

During the last four years, our department has transformed radically its graduate and undergraduate curricula to bring them into consonance with the epistemological and intellectual project of cultural studies. The department's courses now aim to study culture as the larger contextual grid in which individuals and social objects find their ultimate meaning and which they, in turn, help to construct. As opposed to previously, when it was the central and privileged category of study, literature is not assumed to be a closed order of works that reveals essential and immutable human traits or the spiritual monad of a national reality, but one of a varied collection of discourses produced at a given moment in history by a specific social circumstance. This orientation has also guided all recent hires in the department, which have in common the interdisciplinarity of the work of the scholars involved and their capacious understanding of cultural production.

A recent study of academic departments of Hispanic Studies in the United States concluded the following about Columbia's Hispanic Studies major:

"Columbia's program is the only one we found that has truly reconstructed itself from scratch with cultural studies at its core; most other programs appear to have introduced

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changes without significantly upsetting the status quo that maintains a central focus on literature. No other program compared to Columbia's for its innovative structure" (http://www.ncsu.edu/acontracorriente/spring_09/docs/Irwin_and_Szurruk.pdf).

The department's proposed new name bears some unpacking. First, we would like it to be reflective of the several cultural realities that coexist in geographic zones as distinct and separate as the Iberian peninsula, the world south of the Rio Grande, the former colonies of Spain and Portugal in the African continent, and the Hispanic enclaves in the United States. We would also like it to reflect the upending of the metropolis/periphery relationship in which the former is always seen as the source of cultural discourse and the latter as the second-hand producer of its distorted or resisting echo: hence, "Latin American" before "Iberian." Last, we would like it express that our object of study is culture rather than solely language or literature.

We are very pleased and enthusiastic about this request, and hope that you will agree with our reasons for elevating it to your consideration.