Self-Study
Department of Foreign Languages
College of Arts and Letters

2009-2011
Section II – Assessment

CSU, Sacramento
Sacramento, California
Section II

Assessment - “A statement of intended student learning outcomes at the program level; methods for assessing them, including the use of direct measures; assessment results to date and documentation of the use of assessment results in efforts to achieve program improvement.”

The Department of Foreign Languages loosely organizes all of its programs and courses around the learning outcome framework mentioned in the introduction to this proposal. The self-study includes a detailed discussion of our goals. The degree programs are carefully designed to provide students with opportunities to learn and develop as described in this framework. Curriculum matrices documenting this fact are provided in the “Documents Room.” Additionally, the same learning outcome framework has been adapted for the language minors and Master of Arts in Spanish.

The service courses are offered in fulfillment of the University’s foreign language graduation requirement. The 2009-2010 Assessment Report included a pilot assessment of one of the Department’s service courses (SPAN 1B). The Department intends to expand on the pilot for the 2010-2011 Assessment cycle. The findings of the pilot justified continued and expanded use of a Spanish diagnostic exam at the beginning of the semester and a review during the first two weeks of SPAN 1B. The complete 2009-2010 Assessment Report is available on the University Program Assessment Website.

Our assessment work is based on the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999) (see: http://globalteachinglearning.com/standards/5cs.shtml), which also clarifies, “… the standards are not a curriculum guide ... they must be used in conjunction with state and local standards and curriculum frameworks to determine the best approaches and reasonable expectations for the students in individual districts and schools.” Therefore, use of the standards validates the reasons students may have to study foreign languages: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities--the so-called “five C’s” of foreign language education.

This section of the self-study includes the following sub-sections:

A. Overview of Assessment in the Department of Foreign Languages
   1. Assessment of the B.A. Programs in French and Spanish
   2. Assessment of Lower-Division courses
C. Future Assessment Planning
A. Overview of Assessment in the Department of Foreign Languages

The Department of Foreign Languages has assessment reports for academic years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 complied by former Chair Lew Robinson. Assessment for 2002-2003—covered by the 2003 Department’s Self-Study—was also compiled by former Chair Lew Robinson. The reports for 2003-2004; 2004-2005; and 2005-2006 were compiled by former Chair Marjorie Gelus.

Assessment over the last decade included the creation of the document “Introduction to Foreign Languages Departments: Assessment of Students Outcomes” by Professors Elstob (French) and Moore (Spanish) in consultation with Professor Ann Haffer (representing the Office of Academic Affairs). This work served as an assessment tool to be applied to all language programs in the Department. This document is available at the following link: (http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/plans/fl-assessment.aspx), and is the basis of the Department’s current Learning Goals and Learning Objectives/Outcomes of the Language Areas.

As mentioned in the 2003-2004 report, earlier assessment work had addressed only courses in the majors. A memorandum dated April 28, 2004, from former Assessment Director Linda Buckley, however, prompted a shift to include minors and lower-division courses. Specifically, the question to the Department of Foreign Languages regarding this work was: “What types of outcomes assessment are used for skill-based language classes in each of the language areas?” In order to address this new directive, the Assessment Committee chose “to focus less on the large conceptual matrices already generated, and more on an efficient instrument for applying those concepts to the business of assessing student learning” (Assessment Report, 2003-2004, p. 7).

Moreover, a concern mentioned in the 2003-04 Assessment Report addresses the issue of “how cumbersome it can become to try to mold varying sets of standards together into a coherent, user-friendly, and most importantly, useful set of assessment procedures” (2003-2004, p. 4). As a result, the report suggested the use of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines more as a reference tool than as a part of active routine assessment and drew attention to the fact that the 5C’s were developed initially as content standards for K-12 foreign language education. Furthermore, although the proficiency standards were later revised in 1999 with sections addressing classes in post-secondary language education, the report suggests a careful evaluation of “the usefulness of those standards for upper-division university courses in literature and culture” (p. 5).

In order to refine the assessment plan previously drafted as part of the 2000-2001 report, and make it applicable across the language curriculum, and to respond to the recommendations of the Program Review Report (March 29, 2004) regarding how learning objectives are embedded in course work, the Department Assessment Committee (Carol Eberhart, Kevin Elstob, Marjorie Gelus, Laurence Lambert, Kazue Masuyama, Kathy Moore, and Joy Salvetti-Wolfe), worked on the following assessment activities during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 cycles:
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- the development of templates for effective syllabi,
- incorporation of the expectations disseminated by the University via the Dean’s office, and
- the development of student objective/outcome templates for each of the language domains: Language, Civilization and Culture, and Literature.

The templates were given to the faculty, who in turn began the effort of revising course syllabi to include student outcomes.

This work reflects the fact that the Department Assessment Committee began addressing the assessment of minors and lower-division courses as early as 2004. However, institutional directives in 2006 encouraged departments to focus the assessment efforts solely on undergraduate degree programs (to help departments develop sustainable assessment plans and to prepare ready an upcoming WASC accreditation).

During a meeting of October 24, 2006, the then Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Cathy Christo, explained that the task of Department was to report on the department/program level assessment related to the major, not to focus on course assessment or general education. As mentioned earlier, this was a shift from the Department’s assessment work.

In Fall 2006, Dr. Christo also reviewed the assessment plan “Introduction to the Department of Foreign Languages: Assessment of Students Outcomes” and provided several specific comments and suggestions. The first suggestion called for the development of a matrix of courses which links each course with the goals that are addressed in that course. In order to simplify the competencies included in the objectives of the “Introduction to Foreign Languages Departments: Assessment of Students’ Outcomes” (that had been developed by Professors Kathy Moore and Kevin Elstob in 2000-2001), she advised the use the five C’s as goals in combination with the performance standards leading to learner outcomes.

Faculty in the French Area identified courses to measure the learning outcomes, and faculty in the Spanish Area met to review the G (Graduate) exam as an assessment tool. It was found that the G exam measured only one of the learning outcomes (outcome 4.1: Students discuss linguistic similarities and differences between the target language and their own). Therefore, the faculty was presented with several options as possible assessment methods to complement the G exam. The faculty agreed to continue administering the G exam as it was, and any changes in the assessment of the Spanish program would be considered in the following academic year, 2007-2008.

The committee was also charged with writing a mission statement for the department. To that end, on March 21st, 2007 Professors Kazue Masuyama, Beatrice Kelley (Russell) and María Mayberry attended a workshop with Dr. Christo. Although the "Vision and Long-term Plan" was suggested as a mission statement, Dr. Christo defined that document to be a strategic plan. As a result, the Department of Foreign Languages
updated its mission statement and related programmatic information based on Dr. Christo's suggestions.


Starting with the Annual Assessment Report for 2006-2007, the focus was only on the two undergraduate majors (French and Spanish).

Part I. French

The main focus of assessment work in the last four reports (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) for the B.A. program in French has been on speaking and listening skills for communication in "real-life" situations. It focuses on "what students can do with language" rather than "what they know about language." Students are asked to communicate in oral form, interpret oral messages, and show cultural understanding when they communicate, presenting oral information to various audiences for a variety of purposes, requiring fluency, discourse skill and vocabulary.

In the 2007-2008 cycle, French 109 in Fall 2007 (Advanced Practice of French) was chosen as a place to directly evaluate student oral proficiency since it is a well-enrolled class that stresses the use of authentic oral French through its focus on dialogue in scenes from contemporary French movies, using learning outcomes rubrics.

Students improved over the course of the semester as they became motivated and scored well on the type of assignment given to them. An area of concern was seen in the scores in fluency, level of discourse, and students’ ability to use a wide range of vocabulary and incorporate new vocabulary into their dialogues and conversations. The following program directives were anticipated to provide students with more oral practice and have been monitored:

- Instructors must use French in the classroom with the students at all times.
- Students should be strongly encouraged to use French when consulting with the instructor out of class (advising, hallway conversations, office hours, email, etc.).
- Native speakers should be brought into the classroom.
- Students should practice French outside of the classroom with local French-speaking activities (movies, speakers, events etc.).

In the 2008-2009 assessment report, French 125 (Quebec and French in North America), was evaluated on the Communicative Learning Outcome, targeting weekly class discussion and an oral presentation.

- In Class Discussions, students’ language control (grammar, syntax, proper register) and comprehensibility of message (making themselves understood to others) improved to satisfactory levels.
- In Oral Presentation, students reached a satisfactory level (3.5) in all areas except fluency, with a score of 3.45.
Overall, the assessment report indicated that with an oral presentation on an historical or fictional figure, students score well. However, in the class discussions, where there is more spontaneity, scores are below satisfactory. With preparation, students talk about a subject and interact at a level that is satisfactory and above. However, in more open-ended situations, like discussions, where the dialogue moves around several subjects, they are not as proficient. More oral practice was again suggested.

The 2009-2010 report assessed the learning outcomes for oral communication in French 109 (Advanced Practice of French), by evaluating:

- Weekly in-class discussions,
- Three oral/dialogue assignments written at home and performed in class,
- A final Oral Project Presentation.

Analysis of the data indicates that students are not using French as much as we would like them to in independent small group or paired activities, where they have a tendency to fall back onto using English. In traditional teacher-led discussions students do acceptable work. When put in situations where they have to practice oral French, students typically make more mistakes, since it is easier to make mistakes in speaking than in writing. Accuracy will improve with more practice and more motivation to speak more French.

The findings suggest that students are more or less at the same level as what was reported on this outcome over the past two years. Better student scores in these areas can be achieved by giving students more opportunities to practice their oral skills as suggested above.

**Other assessment activities in the B.A. program in French:**

Other Assessment Activities in 2007-08 in the B.A. program in French include course alignment by plotting a matrix of the 5 C’s to identify which classes covered which of the learning outcomes. In discussion among faculty, it has been determined that there are three levels in the French courses:

- **Introduction/gateway.** First-year classes emphasize skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students are introduced to the language as a gateway to the later years.
- **Development/Discovery.** Second-year classes continue to stimulate intellectual openness and interest in French and Francophone culture while continuing to maintain and reinforce communicative skills. Some of our upper-division classes are at the discovery level, enhancing the development of more informed views about the target language and culture.
- **Mastery.** For each of the mastery-level classes, classes were identified meeting learning objectives.

The following are some conclusions from establishing the learning-outcomes matrix:

a. **Flexibility in the order that students take classes.** Students come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and experiences with French (CSUS, Junior and midyear transfers, native or heritage speakers), and they may
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not always be able to rotate into the sequence. We have a flexible approach to the order in which students can take classes that suits their schedule, so long as they have the necessary proficiency in French.

b. Alternatives to taking classes at CSUS. The French Major endeavors to offer students the opportunity of doing their major in four semesters, taking three classes per semester. Due to scheduling clashes or classes that may be canceled due to low enrollment, it may be necessary for students to take longer to complete their degree. Other alternatives include:

- **Study Abroad:** students can take course equivalents abroad.
- **Special Problems:** Students can also enroll in Special Problems/Independent Study courses for specific areas of study of French that are not offered, to meet requirements.

In French, we have to assess individual classes for the particular learning outcomes that each class is covering, rather than being able to test a range of learning outcomes in a capstone or culminating class. In order to evaluate the teaching effectiveness of each class, we assess what level of competency should be acquired by what proportion of the students taking a given class given the various academic backgrounds of our students.

Other Assessment Activities in 2008-09 and 2009-2010 include the development of assessment tools for written communication, cultural proficiency and students’ exposure to the target culture using the target language and participation in the community.

Part II. Spanish

The main focus in the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 reports in the B.A. program in Spanish was the assessment of students’ writing skills and their knowledge of grammar for communication in writing. The assessment report 2009-2010 focused on conversational (speaking and listening) skills.

In evaluating the results from the compositions, it must be kept in mind that the data vary according to students' background and experience with the formal variety of Spanish. While heritage and some native speakers had some difficulties with the formal conventions of the language (accents, spelling, and grammar terminology), second-language learners had more problems with first-language interference (lexical, syntactical, morphological). Although no data were gathered to distinguish true second-language learners from native and heritage speakers, data provided by the Office of Institutional Research concerning enrollment of Foreign Language Majors in the 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 cycles show that the majority of Spanish-language majors are transfer students who enroll in courses numbered 42, Conversation in Spanish, or above. These numbers, together with the data from the compositions and the Graduate Exam (G-Exam), suggest that the variability observed in learners’ language proficiency in the upper-division courses is due to factors external to the CSUS lower-division courses. Moreover, these data suggest the need to strengthen the program at the second and third years, which are the point of entrance for many of our transfer students.
Using the "Rubric for Writing" (developed in 2007), compositions in the 2007-2008 and the 2008-2009 groups were evaluated for clarity of thesis, knowledge of Spanish conventions in writing, organization and coherence, and vocabulary.

In the 2007-2008 Assessment Report, the Spanish Area focused on two short compositions by students in Spanish 103 (Advanced Spanish Grammar) in Fall 2007. As a formative assessment, only two out of 28 students were Spanish seniors.

The 2008-2009 Assessment Report compared writing skills of seniors to juniors (SPAN 103). Spanish 113 (Latin American Literature: Beginnings to Modernism) was chosen because, in the Fall of 2008, 87% of students in that course were seniors.

Analysis of the compositions in Spanish 113 suggests an improvement of students’ writing skills by their senior year. Although some learners still struggle with the written formal conventions of Spanish (e.g., spelling, punctuation, tense usage, transitions, etc.) and the development of a clear and original thesis, most senior students effectively present ideas in a clear and logical order in writing and had good or excellent scores (80 or above) in their compositions.

Overall, the required sequence of grammar/writing courses (Spanish 103--Advanced Grammar--before Spanish 106--Advanced Composition) is effective in helping students to acquire written language skills. However, since some students still need to improve their knowledge of grammar and their writing skills, the writing component was strengthened in Spanish 103. This course now includes a re-write of their compositions after reviewing the feedback provided by the instructor and a final writing project.

Furthermore, Spanish 47 (Introduction to Composition and Grammar Review) was proposed as a prerequisite for Spanish 103. The sequence of courses (Spanish 47, 103 and 106) will strengthen the program at the second and third years—which are the points of entrance for many of our transfer students--and will provide students with more writing practice before they advance to senior courses. This change will likely not take place until Fall 2011. A substantive change such as this requirement needs to be evaluated carefully by the faculty in order to avoid increasing the units required to complete the B.A. program in Spanish, in particular, considering the current budgetary concerns. The Assessment Committee will assess writing skills in two or three years in order to allow for the requirement of Spanish 47 to take place.

The 2009-2010 Assessment Report focused on the overall assessment of conversational (speaking and listening) skills. The data included assessment of interviews (direct measure) with students enrolled in the required Spanish 102 (Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice). The interviews were used to assess speaking skills (oral fluency, vocabulary and grammar use) as well as listening skills of Second Language learners only (no native or heritage speakers).
In general, the data indicate that most senior students are achieving expectations in Oral Communication skills and were rated as “Advanced.” The different components evaluated indicated that oral fluency is the component that differentiates the language competence among participants. Almost all of the students had high scores in listening comprehension (24 or higher out of 25), which is consistent with native and non-native speakers of a language often having an extremely large passive vocabulary compared to a smaller active one.

The data also showed that some learners have listening difficulties when interacting with native speakers who speak at normal speech rates. Conversely, the development of learners’ listening skills has been shown to have a positive effect in learners’ oral production in Spanish.

Assessment of the speaking and listening tasks of seniors suggests that the program--including the SPAN 42 (Conversation in Spanish) and SPAN 102 (Phonetics and Pronunciation) courses--is successful in helping learners develop their oral competence. The results indicate that the speaking and listening proficiency of non-native speakers improves as they continue to advance in the program, as those students who are near graduation and had taken four or more upper-division courses showed the greatest improvement in their overall conversational skills. Students who enter the B.A. program with weak conversational proficiency skills would benefit from completing the lower-division sequence (Spanish 2A and 2B) and taking lower-division courses such as Spanish 7 (reading), and some upper-division courses such as Spanish 47 and 42 (Conversation in Spanish) that can further develop their language skills before attempting to enroll in the more challenging upper-division courses.

Other assessment in the B.A. program in Spanish:
Other Assessment Activities have included assessment of lower-division courses (as mentioned earlier), as well as the development of a self-evaluation questionnaire to survey students’ self-assessment of their experience in the Spanish program:

- **Results of the Self-evaluation questionnaire.** Many of the native speakers and heritage speakers reported having taken Spanish Advanced Placement (AP) courses in High School. Of the 22 native speakers or heritage speakers, however, 13.6% had no grammar courses before starting CSUS; 18% took an AP course with a focus on conversation, but not on grammar; and 27% had taken an AP course with a focus on grammar. These data emphasize the dire need to strengthen the program during the second and third years, at which point many of our transfer students enter the program.

- **Results of Assessment on Lower-Division courses.** In Fall 2008, the average of the diagnostic exam taken by students enrolled in Spanish 1B (the second-semester lower-division course that fulfills the language requirement,) was 50 out of a possible grade of 100. More than half of those surveyed took their previous Spanish class more than 2 years ago. In Spring 2010, the average of the diagnostic exam was 46.48 and one-third had taken a Spanish course more than 4 years ago. These findings underscore the necessity of continuing to offer as many Spanish
1A courses as possible, especially for those students who need to relearn the material of the first-semester course because too much time has elapsed. See Appendix 1 for more detailed information on the 2009-2010 Assessment Report.

C. Future Assessment Planning

In preparation for the Program Review and the next assessment report (2010-2011), the goals and outcomes developed previously for the Bachelor's degree in French and Spanish have now been defined in terms of all of the language areas of the Department of Foreign Languages. The department has also completed the course matrix (see Appendix 2) for all of the eleven languages offered (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Punjabi, Russian and Spanish).

The report for 2010-2011 will also include assessment data for the Minors and the Spanish M.A. program. To that end, and in order to ensure that the department complies with the assessment and program review of the Spanish M.A. program (as called for in the Faculty Senate Executive committee meeting on March 2, 2010), the Spanish area developed the “Rubric for Assessment of Essays in the Master’s Comprehension Exam,” which is currently being evaluated by the Spanish faculty.