

Ongoing Assessment of a University Foreign Language Program

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Abstract: *This paper reviews the process a university foreign language department went through in developing a procedure to assess its curriculum using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and, to a lesser extent, the National Standards, as guiding principles (National Standards, 1996). This procedure included a noncredit workshop that met only once to inform students about the process, an oral proficiency test, and a portfolio of students' written work. Rubrics for evaluation are described. Tables show preliminary results for the first year's assessment. It was found that the average oral proficiency rating for graduating seniors was Advanced-Low and that 74% rated Intermediate-High or better. Similarly, the average written proficiency rating was Advanced-Low. Students also presented material that documented their abilities to analyze literary texts, write in a variety of styles, and demonstrate an awareness of target language culture.*

Introduction

During the past five years, the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Weber State University in Utah has been developing a tool for program assessment. All students in lower division courses have been given an ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) or modified OPI each semester. In addition, the OPI has been used to assess all potential teaching majors and minors since 1990. The new program assessment has been administered to foreign language majors to inform decisions that will impact methodologies and the curriculum. All graduating majors in French, German, and Spanish were asked to participate in "Senior Assessment," for which they prepare a portfolio. These portfolios consist of a computerized test of speaking proficiency and a number of writing samples chosen by each student to showcase his or her work. Faculty members evaluate the students' portfolios using the criteria described in our departmental learning outcome goals.

Our program assessment is intended to do two things. First, it allows a focused examination of curriculum and requirements to assess the department's success in helping students maximize proficiency, and more recently, to check the department's progress in incorporating the National Standards into the curriculum. Second, by looking at students' proficiency and achievement in their senior year, an assessment can be made as to whether or not they are producing the expected results, and if the department's goals are reasonable.

The department began program assessment in 1998 and has implemented, refined, and expanded the procedure each year. The 2001–2002 academic year was the first year for which quantitative and qualitative data for graduating majors were available.

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This article reviews the process the department went through in developing and implementing assessment, and describes the data and results of the first year. It is a report of one department's progress in program assessment and not a theoretical description of program assessment. In practice it was necessary to compromise on a number of issues on which department faculty held different and conflicting views. We feel the department has made an excellent start and offer this paper as the first published report of foreign language program assessment.

Literature Review

A significant body of research has been published on classroom assessment in foreign languages (Hancock [Ed.], 1994; Hewitt, Ryan, & Kuhs, 1993; Lafayette [Ed.], 1996) but less has been written about the assessment of departments and programs. Traditional accreditation reviews have focused on faculty preparation, courses offered, and numbers of students—but not on student achievement. This focus is changing; both the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) are involved in applying assessment standards to accreditation reviews at the college level. The National Foreign Language Standards Collaborative worked with ACTFL to establish new program standards for foreign language teacher preparation.

The new standards were approved by NCATE in October 2002. Foreign language teacher preparation programs that are reviewed by NCATE had to start using these standards in 2004. The K–12 Student Standards for Foreign Language Learning are the “foundation” of the ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL, 2002). The faculty of both the foreign language department and the teacher education department are responsible for the preparation of foreign language teachers, and must demonstrate that they address or include the following in their programs:

1. The development of candidates' foreign language proficiency in all areas of communication, with special emphasis on developing oral proficiency, in all language courses. Upper-level courses should be taught in the foreign language.
2. An ongoing assessment of candidates' oral proficiency and provision of diagnostic feedback to candidates concerning their progress in meeting required levels of proficiency.
3. Language, linguistics, culture, and literature components.
4. A methods course that deals specifically with the teaching of foreign languages, and that is taught by a qualified faculty member whose expertise is foreign language education and who is knowledgeable about current instructional approaches and issues.

5. Field experiences prior to student teaching that include experiences in foreign language classrooms.
6. Field experiences, including student teaching, that are supervised by a qualified foreign language educator who is knowledgeable about current instructional approaches and issues in the field of foreign language education.
7. Opportunities for candidates to experience technology-enhanced instruction and to use technology in their own teaching.
8. Opportunities for candidates to participate in a structured study abroad program and/or intensive immersion in a target language community. (ACTFL, 2002, p. 24)

The foreign language teacher candidates must meet the following six content standards:

- Standard 1: Language, Linguistics, Comparisons
- Standard 2: Cultures, Literatures, Cross-Disciplinary Concepts
- Standard 3: Language Acquisition Theories and Instructional Practices
- Standard 4: Integration of Standards into Curriculum and Instruction
- Standard 5: Assessment of Languages and Cultures
- Standard 6: Professionalism (2002, p. 25)

In addition, ACTFL has worked with the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) in disseminating information about the language standards and assessment standards at pre-collegiate levels and modifying curricula, methodology, and materials to better reflect the standards (Schrier & Hammadou, 1994).

Program assessment is similar to the assessment of an individual student or of a class. Our department used a variety of assessment tools at the classroom level, including OPIs, written exams, correction of essays and term papers, and of course, class grades. All of these aim at assessing student abilities in a particular course and the feedback allows the students to see where they need to focus their efforts, but also allows instructors to make improvements and adjustments in teaching the course. As we designed our program assessment at Weber State University, we did not aim to provide student feedback, but rather to gather information regarding the success of the department's practices, curriculum and requirements, and to see if we, as a department, were producing the results we expected, based on our projected outcomes.

Our program assessment was specifically set up not to be a high-stakes test for students. We purposely avoid telling them “how they did.” Although some institutions

have created an assessment tool that is formative, or a "tool for student learning" (Marwick, 1998) we felt that our efforts were better focused if we concentrated on assessing only our program by looking at student proficiency and achievement.

Many studies have supported the idea of using a portfolio in assessment. Portfolios allow a focus on creating a product and can stress students' abilities rather than merely their knowledge. Portfolios provide students the flexibility to choose their best work and an opportunity to reflect on the learning experience (Moore, 1994; Schrier & Hammadou, 1994). Gentile (1992) described an "assessment portfolio" as one that contains a number of documents representing various areas within a discipline and Moore (1994) stated that the same type of portfolio used for assessing writing can also be used to assess culture. Portfolio assessment, according to Moore, "allows students to be assessed in a cumulative way, at all levels and stages of learning" (1994, p. 177). At beginning levels of language learning, students may study simple topics at simple levels and then choose their best project for the portfolio. At the intermediate level, they may be required to choose two projects, and at the advanced level, several. This way, as in assessment of writing, students are evaluated at different levels. As Moore further pointed out, "creating a portfolio is in itself a type of formative evaluation," because "students are involved in *selecting, planning, organizing and producing*" their own portfolios (1994, p. 178).

In their discussion of portfolios, Mullen, Bauer, and Newbold (2001) described the development of electronic or web-based portfolio systems for teacher education. Many institutions, including Weber State University, allow for the creation of electronic portfolios. Although we are currently collecting "hard" portfolios for program assessment, moving to a completely electronic version would not be difficult and is being considered.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has reported on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in foreign languages (Marcos, 2000; "Strong start," 2000). NAEP emphasizes the use of the three modes of communication (i.e., interpersonal, interactive, and presentational). This trimodal framework was included in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1996) but was originally proposed by Brecht and Walton (1995) in order to illustrate how people participate in "cultural discourses." Our students may not necessarily choose to include representative samples from all three modes in their portfolios. In the future we may wish to be more specific in describing what material students should include, however, we must then insure that each mode is being used in all or most of the courses taught in the department. This could be done through the use of Performance Assessment Units as described by ACTFL (1998). At that point we would also

need to rework our student learning outcomes and our assessment criteria to reflect this emphasis on modes of communication.

Process in Developing Goals and Determining Department Standards

Several faculty members in the Department of Foreign Languages at Weber State University are professionally interested in pedagogy and assessment. Nevertheless, the impetus to begin working on assessment as a major departmental goal came from university administrators, who, because of upcoming accreditation reviews and pressure from state legislators and other external organizations, were looking for departments willing to volunteer and spearhead early efforts to deal with assessment issues. Our department stepped up as the first in the College of Arts and Humanities.

Rennie (1998, p. 30) presented a "Preliminary Assessment Checklist" that neatly illustrated the process our department went through in developing our assessment. The first four items on her list are: (a) What are the instructional goals? (b) What is the purpose of this assessment? (c) What needs to be known about the students? and (d) How will the results be used?

Our first task was to develop a departmental mission statement. A statement had existed in the department for some time and completing this first step was mostly a matter of making minor changes. Our statement, submitted in 1998, reads as follows:

Foreign Language Department Mission Statement & Program Goals

PROGRAM MISSION

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, offers majors and minors in French, German, and Spanish, a minor in Japanese, courses in Latin and classical civilization and other language courses as needed. We support our university's focus on providing quality undergraduate programs, offering life-long learning opportunities for a diverse community of learners and working closely with private and public agencies in the area.

A degree in foreign languages and literatures prepares our students for careers in teaching, the arts, international business, government and travel. The rigorous study of foreign languages, literature, and culture also prepares students for other employment opportunities which require knowledge of foreign cultures and critical thinking skills.

PROGRAM GOALS

Our faculty believe that quality undergraduate education encourages contact between students and faculty, develops reciprocity and cooperation among stu-

dents, uses interactive learning techniques, communicates high expectations and respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Our department is unique in that the majority of our major and minor students have lived and worked in the country of the target language and culture they are studying. We also provide sheltered courses for those students who come to our program without any previous experience or knowledge of the language and culture they wish to study.¹

We believe that our students should be given the opportunity to become more proficient in the language they are studying through a variety of new technological advances.

We subscribe to the Proficiency Guidelines delineated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)². The study of foreign language offers the student the opportunity to communicate with native speakers of the target language, to understand and compare cultures, and to make connections with communities and other disciplines.

The department's mission statement was created just as the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project was being completed. No attempt was made to mirror the National Standards exactly in the department's mission statement. Nevertheless, the National Standards did play a role in the process and they are reflected in the mission statement and more specifically in the student learning outcomes.

The next step was to define a number of student learning outcomes—abilities or traits that we hope to see in our graduating majors. The first outcome, dealing with oral proficiency, was the most problematic. Since all of the professors in the department have been trained by ACTFL to administer the OPI, there was extensive discussion as to which proficiency level should be required of our students at the end of each level of instruction and at graduation. Many faculty members felt strongly that if a specific minimum proficiency level were stipulated, it would become less of a goal and less of a standard, and more of a mere minimum requirement, thus turning our assessment process into one of high-stakes testing. Others felt that a test for the department was exactly what was needed and that with no specification in the learning outcomes of projected levels of proficiency, we were not measuring anything at all. The final decision of the department was to determine the oral proficiency levels and examine other skills of all graduating seniors in order to establish a baseline. In the future we will revisit our student learning outcomes and determine whether or not to specify projected levels.

The department has for many years required Intermediate-High proficiency—both orally and in writing—of all candidates for teacher education. Weber State

University is the only university in the state of Utah that will not allow students who are below that level to complete the courses required for state certification as foreign language teachers. Before teaching majors or minors can student teach, they are required to take the foreign language department's teaching methods course and must meet the Intermediate-High requirement before registration.

It also seemed obvious that until the assessment process had been in place for a year or so, there would be insufficient data on which to base an informed cutoff level. Setting the proficiency level too high or too low could result in an unfair and unrealistic labeling of the department, or of individual students. Within a few years, sufficient data will have been collected to accurately describe students' oral and written proficiency levels. At that time the department will revisit the issue of setting a specific expected proficiency-level in the mission statement or in the student learning outcomes.

After many lengthy discussions, the entire department faculty agreed upon the following student learning outcomes in the fall of 1999:

Foreign Language Department Student Learning Outcomes

Upon graduation, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency in the language they are studying.
2. Demonstrate the ability to write in different styles.
3. Demonstrate an adequate command of grammar, mechanics, and the ability to use a variety of sentence structures to express their ideas.
4. Read and understand popular and literary texts in the language; analyze literary works and discern moral, cultural, and aesthetic values.
5. Demonstrate an awareness of the similarities and differences among the cultures of the language being studied as they compare to other cultures.

These outcomes, although they make no overt reference to the National Standards, do address them as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

COORDINATION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

Standards	Student Learning Outcomes				
	1	2	3	4	5
Communication	x	x	x	x	
Culture				x	x
Connections				x	x
Comparisons		x		x	x
Communities		x		x	x

During the fall semester of 2000, we proposed a senior assessment workshop that met only once and was required of all graduating seniors. The workshop was listed as a course, but with no credit, for several reasons: (a) having the assessment process listed as a required course meant that nearly all students, even those who avoid advisement, were aware of the requirement; (b) having the assessment process somewhat more formalized, with an orientation meeting and well-defined expectations, encouraged our students to treat the process seriously; and (c) since the amount of work required of the students was minimal (a 15- to 20-minute oral exam and compiling a few documents to place in a portfolio), we did not feel that any course credit was warranted. At Weber State, one credit hour implies 15 hours of student–teacher contact plus appropriate outside-of-class work. We estimated that students would spend fewer than five hours on our assessment, including the orientation meeting. Certainly, many spent much less time than that because they were advised in class to keep their written work for later use in Senior Assessment.

The idea of an actual capstone course, in which seniors would have a culminating experience in their language and each would write a senior thesis, was discussed at length, but eventually dismissed for two major reasons. First, because we would not be permitted by the university to raise the number of credits required for a major in French, German, or Spanish, (our major already requires from 46–50 semester credit hours, including first and second year courses) any capstone course would then replace an existing requirement or elective. We felt that our students were best served by the breadth and variety offered in our existing major requirement course list, and that to take away an elective and replace it with a senior capstone course would not be in their best interest. Second, none of the faculty in the department had much desire to teach such a course if it meant supplanting more interesting teaching assignments.

The no-credit senior assessment course, ForLng 4990, required of all language majors, was approved by college and university curriculum committees in the spring of 2001 and was “on the books” for the first time for the 2001–2002 school year. This is the only zero-credit course offered at the university and the registrar and records offices were reticent to allow it. However, there have been only a few problems with the arrangement. The university catalog description reads as follows:

Assessment

During their senior year, all foreign language majors will complete ForLng 4990 in order to help the department assess how well it has met its goals. Students are encouraged to keep copies of their best work from each course taken in the major. These examples will be used in ForLng 4990. (Weber State University, 2003, p. 123)

ForLng 4990. Senior Assessment (0)

Required of all majors during their senior year. Students will assemble a portfolio with a representation of their work in the foreign language. Speaking skills will also be evaluated. Must be completed before graduation clearance. (p. 128)

Senior Assessment Portfolios and the Computerized Oral Proficiency Test

Once our outcomes were defined, deciding what needed to be included in our assessment portfolio was relatively simple. A small committee within the department put together some ideas that were approved by the department faculty.

Table 2 shows the outcomes as well as the documentation students would submit to demonstrate their abilities related to that outcome.

The first outcome, relating to oral proficiency, is assessed with a Computerized Oral Proficiency Test

Table 2

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXPECTED DOCUMENTATION FOR ASSESSMENT

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency in the language they are studying.
2. Demonstrate the ability to write in different styles.
3. Demonstrate a command of grammar, mechanics, and the ability to use a variety of sentence structures to express their ideas.
4. Read and understand popular and literary texts in the language; analyze literary works and discern moral, cultural and aesthetic values.
5. Demonstrate an awareness of the similarities and the differences among the cultures of the language being studied as they compare to other cultures.

Documentation

- Students will take an oral proficiency test on the computer (COPT).
- Students will submit at least two documents in different styles.
- Students will submit at least one document that shows a command of grammar, etc.
- Students will submit at least one document that shows their ability to analyze written texts.
- Students will submit at least one document that shows their understanding of target cultures.

(COPT). Due to the high number of language majors at Weber State University and limited faculty resources, it was determined that the time invested in administering and rating ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interviews would be prohibitive. We decided to use a Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), following the pattern developed at CAL (Malone, 2000; Stansfield & Keynon, 1992). After some experimentation, we settled on a software program created at the Humanities Research Center at Brigham Young University and sold commercially: Enhanced Oral Testing Software (2000). We have been successful in administering the test, which students take at a computer in our department and their responses are digitally recorded. These recordings are a great advantage. While describing their Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument (COPI), CAL mentioned that, "The COPI also enables the rater to 'rewind' or 'fast-forward' an examinee['s] response with a single click, and easily navigate from one task to another, or from one examinee to the next" (CAL, 2002). Our test allows the same ease in rating.

Our students have reported no problems with this computerized interview. Kenyon and Malabonga (2001) claimed that examinees prefer a computerized test (i.e., the COPI) and found it less difficult than the tape-recorded SOPI.

All of the faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages at Weber State University have been trained by ACTFL to administer the OPI. Two professors listen to each student's recorded answers and assign a proficiency rating following the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Scale, from Novice-Mid to Superior.

For the rest of our student learning outcomes, we require students to submit examples of their written work in a portfolio. In most of our classes we now encourage students, particularly majors, to keep copies of all written assignments or at least their best work. While the second outcome requires more than one document from each student, the other outcomes may refer to documents already included. It is possible for a student to complete the portfolio with only two documents, although very few students have attempted to do this.

Evaluation of Computerized Oral Proficiency Test

The data we have collected reflect our graduating seniors from the academic year (2001–2002). In that group, there were a total of 34 students who submitted both an oral test and a written portfolio. Of these, 26 were in Spanish, 6 were in German, and 4 were in French. As mentioned above, two raters using the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines evaluated each oral test. The results of this rating are shown in Table 3.

The reliability of our oral assessment may be called into question by the relatively small number of equal rat-

ings. In order to arrive at a final rating, all proficiency ratings, as categorical data, are converted to numbers (with 1 representing Novice-Low; 2 as Novice-Mid, and so on; ending with 10 as Superior). With numerical data, student ratings can be easily compared and average ratings can be determined.

In order to arrive at a final rating, if a student's ratings are only one level apart, we assign the lower of the two. Thus, student 4, in French, with a rating of Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High, is assigned a combined rating of Intermediate-Mid. If a student's ratings are two levels apart, we choose the intervening level as the combined rating. Student 6, in German, is an example: He rates Intermediate-High and Advanced-Mid, so we assigned a final rating of Advanced-Low. Finally, if two levels intervened, we secured a third rating and try then to find an equitable solution. This happened only twice, with students 22 and 32, both in Spanish. In both cases, the third rater, uninformed of the previous ratings, easily resolved the issue.

There were several causes for concern in the oral assessment. Several students spoke so softly (despite a "sound test" meant to help them set the volume) that their responses could hardly be made out. In addition, the response times were set rather short. Raters suggested that some students were just warming up to a topic when their time ran out. In the future, we will extend response times and encourage students to be more attentive to the "sound test" before starting.

Another possible problem with this set of data is that one of the raters may not have understood the task. Our department has established Intermediate-High as a minimal acceptable rating for teacher education candidates. The second German rater merely reported that all of the German students were Intermediate-High. There are two possible explanations. She may have listened only for Intermediate-High responses and once that was achieved, stopped the rating process. Or, since at the time this rater had completed only MOPI training (which tests up to the Advanced level), she may not have discriminated differences at the higher levels. This same instructor has since completed OPI training.

Overall oral proficiency ratings are shown in Table 4. The average for all 35 majors was Advanced-Low.

Evaluation of Written Portfolios

For the rest of the outcomes, we have received written work from the students as described previously. Most students include a total of five or six documents, mostly compositions and essays, but occasionally letters and creative work. A rubric or list of criteria has been created for the evaluation of each of the remaining four student learning outcomes. These criteria are summarized in Table 5.

Table 3

ORAL ASSESSMENT RATINGS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS (2001–2002)

French											
No.	Novice			Intermediate			Advanced			Sup.	AVG
	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1							xx				AL
2	*				x						IM
3					xx						IM
4					x	x					IM
German											
No.	Novice			Intermediate			Advanced			Sup.	AVG
	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High		
5						x	x				IH
6						x		x			AL
7						x	x				IH
8						xx					IH
9						x	x				IH
10						x	x				IH
Spanish											
No.	Novice			Intermediate			Advanced			Sup.	AVG
	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High	Low	Mid	High		
11							x	x			AL
12						x	x				IH
13								xx			AM
14					x		x				IH
15							x	x			AL
16						x		x			AL
17						x		x			AL
18					x	x					IM
19									xx		AH
20							x	x			AL
21								xx			AM
22					xx			x			IM
23										x	AH
24						x	x				IH
25								x		x	AH
26								xx			AM
27					xx						IM
28								x	x		AM
29							x	x			AI
30					x		x				IH
31					x	x					IM
32					x			xx			AM
33					x	x					IM
34							x			x	AM
35					x	x					IM

Note. * = not ratable

Table 4

TALLIED ORAL PROFICIENCY RATINGS				
	French	German	Spanish	All
N	4	6	25	35
Average	5.5	6.2	6.9	6.6
Rating	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-High	Advanced-Low	Advanced-Low
Standard Deviation	1.00	0.41	1.37	1.29

Note. 1 = Novice-Low and 10 = Superior

Table 5

CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS		
Outcome	Observation	Rubric for Evaluation
1. Demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency in the language they are studying.	Computerized Oral Proficiency Test	ACTFL Oral Proficiency Scale
2. Demonstrate the ability to write in different styles.	At least two documents in different styles	Students demonstrate at least two different styles from the following: description, narrative, exposition, journalism, argument, letters, instructions
3. Demonstrate a command of grammar, mechanics, and the ability to use a variety of sentence structures to express their ideas.	At least one document	ACTFL Written Proficiency Scale ("grammar" here includes syntax, breadth of vocabulary, and discourse rules).
4. Read and understand popular and literary texts in the language; analyze literary works and discern moral, cultural and aesthetic values.	At least one document	Students do some or all of the following, in order of importance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A main idea or purpose of the text is identified and discussed. • There is a thesis and argument as well as a good introduction and conclusion. • A working knowledge of literary terminology is demonstrated. • Stylistic features of the text are discussed, and examples of such devices as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolism are explained. • Grammatical structure, (e.g., vocabulary and verb tenses) are discussed as they relate to establishing the meaning of the text.
5. Demonstrate an awareness of the similarities and the differences among the cultures of the language being studied as they compare to other cultures.	At least one document	Based on National Standard on Culture

In fall semester 1998, Weber State University converted from a quarter system to semesters. This change allowed most programs to revisit their course expectations and curricula. The Department of Foreign Languages and

Literatures made significant changes at that time. Since our student learning outcomes and our course curriculum were, to a certain extent, created or reevaluated at the same time, all of our students have been able to meet our basic

expectations. There was, however, a significant amount of variation.

Our second student learning outcome requires that students demonstrate an ability to write in a number of different styles. Students were asked to submit at least two documents demonstrating different types of writing. On average, students submitted three writing samples for this outcome. The most common genre submitted was description, followed closely by exposition, narration, and argument. A few students have turned in publicity and brochures and one student submitted grammatical exercises (these were prose). This distribution is not at all surprising. Most of our courses require student writing, and the kind of writing submitted tends to be typical for grammar and composition courses as well as courses in literature and culture.

To illuminate the third student learning outcome, we asked our students to submit at least one document that demonstrates their command of grammar, mechanics, and sentence structure. We evaluated this document using the ACTFL Revised Proficiency Guidelines—Written (ACTFL, 2001), with a special emphasis on composition and form. The results of our ratings on this outcome are shown in Table 6. The overall average proficiency rating was Advanced-Low.

The fourth student learning outcome deals with our students' ability to read and understand popular and literary texts. We asked that they submit a single document and we rated it looking for the markers presented in Table 5. All majors are required to take an introduction to literature as well as at least one additional literature course. The work submitted shows the markers in descending order of prevalence; that is almost all students have a main idea or purpose of the text, fewer however write a good thesis statement, as well as a good introduction and conclusion, fewer still demonstrate a working knowledge of literary terminology. Table 7 shows the percentages of all portfolios that meet each of the criteria for literary analysis.

The last criterion, discussing grammatical structure (e.g., vocabulary and verb tenses as they relate to establishing the meaning of a text), is only illustrated in 14% of the portfolios. All of these were submitted by French students. This criterion was met by 40% of French majors and the French sector, in particular, emphasized how the meaning

or nuance of a verb can dramatically change depending on conjugation. Students were encouraged to consider this in literary analysis. We believe that this is a skill specifically taught in French classes, but not emphasized in the other languages.

For our final student learning outcome, we ask that our students submit at least one document that displays their awareness of the similarities and differences among the target cultures and other cultures. We tentatively look to the National Standards, as they relate to culture, as a guide to whether or not our students have developed this awareness. Specifically, we have focused on Standards 2 and 4 (National Standards, 1996; Phillips & Draper, 1999). In the future, we will need to devise a more credible and measurable criterion against which to measure our students in this outcome.

As it is, our rubric merely asked the rater to decide whether or not the student demonstrates an awareness of the similarities and differences among cultures. On that question, 86% of the portfolios received a positive rating; the remaining students either did not submit a document to illustrate their awareness of culture, or more often, submitted a document that failed to demonstrate such awareness. Although we do not feel that 86% is by any means a poor outcome, we do feel that this student learning outcome is our weakest. It is possible, although unlikely, that a student might major in a foreign language at Weber State University without taking a course specifically designed to teach culture as its major focus.

Conclusion and Plans for Refinement/Improvement

What is described here is obviously just a beginning in our department's process of program assessment. However, with just one year of data we have been able to determine that both in principle and in practice our assessment process is workable.

Students have been very accommodating in assembling their portfolios and scheduling the COPT. This is due, in part, to the fact that our assessment took the form of a "class" which had to be completed before the students could be cleared for graduation. To our knowledge, no students have complained about the added requirement, even

Table 6

TALLIED WRITTEN PROFICIENCY RATINGS, WITH EMPHASIS ON GRAMMAR, 2001–2002

	French	German	Spanish	All
Average	7.1	7.0	7.8	7.21
Rating	Advanced-Low	Advanced-Low	Advanced-Mid	Advanced-Low
Standard Deviation	1.22	0.71	1.71	1.19

Note. 1 = Novice-Low and 10 = Superior

Table 7

PERCENTAGE OF PORTFOLIOS INCLUDING DIFFERENT CRITERIA FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS, 2001–2002

Criterion	Percent
A main idea or purpose of the text is identified and discussed.	93%
There is a thesis and argument as well as a good introduction and conclusion.	79%
A working knowledge of literary terminology is demonstrated.	71%
Stylistic features of the text are discussed, and examples of such devices as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolism are explained.	57%
Grammatical structure (e.g., vocabulary and verb tenses) are discussed as they relate to establishing the meaning of the text.	14%

though most of them declared their major in foreign language before the assessment process existed.

We understand that program assessment is an ongoing process. Not only do we expect to make changes to the process of gathering and evaluating the data itself, but the results will hopefully point us in appropriate directions in which to make changes in our curriculum and our classroom practices. One immediate refinement we need to make is to define a rubric for the evaluation of our fifth student learning outcome dealing with culture.

In the near future we plan on establishing a statistical baseline for the COPT by administering the test to a sample of students in our core third year grammar and composition class. This will, of course, give us a better picture of what oral proficiency our students have at the beginning of their major careers, in order to compare that with oral proficiency levels closer to graduation.

In addition, we plan to compare two major subgroups among our graduates, namely, those with significant foreign residence and those without. At present, we provide “sheltered” sections of two core courses for majors and minors, which are reserved for students without foreign experience. Separating the data will allow us to determine whether or not these sections are necessary or sufficient.

Due, in part, to the increased emphasis on outcomes assessment at the national level, reflected vividly in requirements for state, regional, and national accreditation, and in part due to our department’s intrinsic commitment to assessment and program review, we feel that the process we have begun is an important one. We look forward to continued work in this area.

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Notes

1. At Weber State University, foreign language students come with one of two basic backgrounds. Most of our majors and minors are returned missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and have lived up to two years immersed in a foreign language environment. The other group of students has studied a foreign language at the high school and college level, but has no significant experience in a target language community. In many classes, particularly those where conversation and oral skills play a large part, the second group is at a noticeable disadvantage. For some of our courses we offer a “sheltered” section, in which native speakers and returned missionaries cannot enroll. These sheltered sections are limited to students who have only studied the language in the classroom and have little or no immersion experience. In most courses, however, we do not distinguish between the groups.

2. Our classes are taught from the very beginning for proficiency. We have minimal proficiency levels established for each course level (e.g., at the end of first year, students should be speaking at least at the Novice-High level, based on the ACTFL Revised Proficiency Guidelines—Speaking [Breiner-Sanders, Lowe, Miles, & Swender, 1999].)

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