

Department of World Language Studies

Indiana University South Bend

ASSESSMENT PLAN 2010

(Updated from 2007)

I. Educational goals

a. Students majored in World Language Studies (language competence): a minimum level of Intermediate High, or level 6 out of 10 levels.

At the completion of the major in French, German and Spanish our students should be functional in a second language. Functional communication is attained when students reach at least the “intermediate high” level in reading, writing, listening comprehension, and speaking. Students of non Indo-European languages will typically take longer than two years to achieve this level of proficiency. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL¹), “intermediate high” level students are “able to read consistently with full understanding simple connected texts, [and] some main ideas and information from texts at the next higher level.” Students at this level can also “meet most practical writing needs...respond in writing to personal questions...write simple letters, brief synopses, [etc].” In listening comprehension, students are “able to sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places;” while in speaking, students are “able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations...initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies,” despite inevitable errors. The “intermediate high” level also corresponds to the Indiana Professional Standards Board's requirement for Foreign Language teachers. Given the current professional environment for second language education, we will most likely move our expectations up to a minimum satisfactory level of Advanced High.

b. Students majored in World Language Studies (cultural competence): A minimum level of Deeper Understanding, or level 5 out of 6 levels.

Unlike other academic units and departments, the department of World Language Studies has the ability to make students proficient in other cultures, in the target language of the culture they study. At the completion of the major in French, German and Spanish our students should be well-versed in the culture (literature included) of the language they studied. Being culturally well-versed involves a series of skills and a specific, new attitude toward the target culture. There are 6 different levels in cultural literacy, each one presenting a different set of descriptors (Seelye in Warford, Mark K. *Assessing Target Cultural*

¹<http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm> (ACTFL level descriptors)

*Literacy: the Buffalo State Experience*²). While levels 1 and 2 usually describe first and second years of language/culture instruction, levels 3 through 6 correspond to students majored in World Language Studies.

Students in levels 1 and 2 tend to cluster and simplify knowledge about the target culture, but those who progress into third-year-level work can interpret authentic materials (level 3) and make cross-cultural comparisons (level 4). Unlike US-made and English annotated foreign language textbooks, authentic materials are produced by and intended for native users. For the student majored in World Language Studies, studying human practices and products outside the English speaking world involves facing authentic materials, and (ideally) living authentic experiences in the target language, either in the US or abroad. Authentic materials include world histories (sometimes at odds with US perspectives), literary works, visual arts (including cinema), music, and newsprints. At level 5, students provide examples of the influence that history, geography, and social institutions have on products and customs in the target language. They can also summarize the importance of historical events and cultural practices in their own words, and develop their own opinions and hypothesis on events and practices, in the target language. In level 5, the students' attitude toward the study of world cultures includes a reflection on their (previous) preconceived ideas about the target culture. This "new attitude" appears as they consider ethnocentrism, and the students' own cultural identity. For students planning to pursue graduate programs, the appropriate level would be level 6.

c. Students fulfilling a language requirement (language competence): intermediate low, or level 4 out 10 levels.

Students in the College of Arts and Sciences who are required to take four semesters of a foreign language should be somewhat functional in a second language and attain an "intermediate low" by the ACTFL scale. At this level, students can "understand main ideas and/or some facts from the simplest connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs" when reading in the target language, and "meet limited practical writing needs [with] short messages, postcards... telephone messages." When listening, students at the "intermediate low" level can deal with "social conventions and routine tasks, such as getting meals and receiving simple instructions and directions." In speaking, students at this level "handle successfully... interactive, task-oriented, and social situations... ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and maintain face-to-face conversation [although] with much linguistic inaccuracy."

d. Students fulfilling a language requirement (cultural competence): At least Simple Understanding, or level 2 out of 6 levels.

All students taking language courses in our department should become acquainted with issues involving cross-cultural communication, world geography, and should develop an appreciation for and sensitivity to people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. This goal is attained at a level 2 of cultural competence. First-year students will typically learn about products (crafts), practices (holidays), and a few general facts, and will show some interest in cultural difference (level 1). In level 2 of cultural literacy, students will become more aware of ethnic diversity among different countries and regions, and while exhibiting "some curiosity about and empathy toward the target culture, [their] beliefs may still be

²Wardford, Mark K. 2006. *Assessing Target Cultural Literacy: The Buffalo State Experience*. ADFL Bulletin. New York: ADFL.

ethnocentric” (Wardford 2006). Occasionally, there will be students who “demonstrate social distance from the target culture, harboring responses ranging from apathy to strong prejudices [and] open resistance to target culture discussion” (Storme and Derakhshani in Warford 2006). “Culture incompetence,” or level 0, often describes students who only focus on the study of formal language in order to fulfill a language requirement, while failing to achieve a minimum level of cultural competence.

II. Methodologies for Measuring the Attainment of Educational Goals

a. Language competence.

The department used either a computer-based, or a hard-copy, reading proficiency exam (CARLA) and tested several sections of second year language classrooms to assess reading proficiency (see answer to question 6 in the 2010 Third-Year Review Assessment Review). Our plan is to extend the use of the CARLA exam to as many sections as possible in the next three years.

The department also conducted oral exams at the end of each semester of instruction, as well as oral presentations at the third and fourth years. Our plan is to apply ACFL proficiency placement descriptors in as many sections of language instruction as possible in the next three years (particularly in sections taught by full-time faculty who are familiar with ACFTL standards), and evaluate not only task oriented, instructor-coached or previously home-prepared discourse (such as the one used for oral presentations), but spontaneous, situation-improvised speaking.

Proficiency in writing is assessed through regular compositions and essays in the target language, both in and out of the classroom, in all levels of instruction, although not in a unified and systematic manner yet. We placed nineteen graduates in writing proficiency since 2007 (see Appendix 2) according to ACFTL standards after studying their writing sample port-folios (see changes to the student port-folio artifact list in Appendix 3). Our plan is to homogenize the tasks in written assignments in order to better address the specific proficiency goals in form (language competence) and in content (culture competence), not only to graduating seniors, but also to second, third, and fourth years of instruction. As in oral exams, we also want to test spontaneous writing to better assess students’ writing proficiency.

b. Culture competence.

The department used student port-folios from nineteen graduates to assess whether students’ placed at a minimum satisfactory level of cultural competence, or level 5 (see Appendix 2). Writing samples in port-folios showed that all senior-level students understood “the influence that history, geography, and social institutions have on products and customs in the target language.” Port-folio samples also showed that students were able to summarize historical events, cultural practices, and formulate opinions and hypothesis in the target language, all of which are level 5 skills. However, we are not sure that all students showed the “deeper understanding” required in the examination of ethnocentric attitudes and the students’ cultural self-reflection expected in level 5 of culture proficiency, because the studied writing samples do not illustrate this point directly. Our plan is to guide the specific task of the seniors’ last writing sample (see seniors’ port-folio artifact list in Appendix 3) to better assess the value of this self reflection.

III. Process for Using Assessment Information

a. Information collected: The study of writing samples from nineteen seniors helped us understand that we need to channel the tasks of some writing samples toward the culture goal of “deeper understanding” and,

more importantly, clarify course goals and redirect class activities to better meet the desired objective. Instructors in courses such as S302, S325, S363, F363, and S412 suspected this problem and have already taken the initiative of changing course materials and syllabi to include more task-oriented, cross-cultural analysis assignments.

b. Budget: Given the small available budget, reallocations to address curriculum changes are minimal. However, the department is always looking for new venues (external funding) to help students study and live abroad for at least one semester at the junior or senior levels.

c. Changes in curriculum/ scheduling/ advising: Changes have been already made and will continue in curriculum. For example, we offered new summer culture training intensive courses such as S303, although enrolment has decreased in the past two summers for this class. We also intend to continue changing goals in some courses, as explained in point “a” above. Department advisors are taking an increasingly active role in sending students abroad to strengthen their language and culture proficiencies.

d. Revision and Update of assessment plan: We believe this plan is an improvement of the previous, 2007 assessment plan, although we acknowledge that it is nothing more than work in progress.

IV. Participation of all constituencies

- a. Faculty: 7 of our faculty members participated in gathering data, and 3 members participated in interpreting data and in writing and revising the reports.
- b. Students: Twelve graduating students participated in assessment through the exit interview (see Appendix 1). Our plan is to consider whether regular student evaluations (in all classes) should be included as well. Students are aware of assessment goals through course syllabi stating the ACTFL proficiency level they need to achieve. Our plan is to make sure that all students in all sections have such goals in mind at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of each semester.
- c. Alumni: Former students’ feedback informed us of whether our educational goals provided them with employment or educational opportunities. Out of 19 former senior graduates, 6 expressed satisfaction in their ability to enter graduate programs, and 5 expressed satisfaction in their ability to find jobs in teaching, translation, or to be promoted in their former jobs.

V. Records

- a. Our department continues keeping an archive of student portfolios, and also has an increasingly large folder in the H drive including placement scores in oral and writing proficiencies.
- b. The department has one liaison that from now on will be responsible for filing annual and third year reports with the Assessment Committee.
- c. No initiative has been taken in publishing assessment goals and data in our department website. However, our plan is to start doing so in 2011 when it is time to update our website.
- d. We are committed to submitting our reports as timely as possible.