

Department of Foreign Languages
Illinois State University

Assessment Plan (B.A. in Spanish)
Assessment Report 2004

Assessment Plan (B.A. in Spanish)

The B.A. in Spanish provides students with advanced language skills and knowledge of Spanish culture, literature, language, and pedagogy. These skills and knowledge will enable them to be intelligent and responsible citizens of a globalized world and to successfully pursue careers in teaching, business, government, or non-governmental organizations.

A. The specific learning objectives of the B.A. in Spanish, including the Teacher Certification Sequence, are:

1. competency in speaking, writing, listening, and reading the foreign language.
Competency will include the ability to successfully communicate orally with a fluent speaker of the foreign language, read texts of an advanced level of difficulty written in a foreign language, and write the language grammatically;
2. knowledge of the Hispanic cultures;
3. competency in analyzing the linguistic structure of Spanish;
4. competency in analyzing Hispanic literature;
5. in the case of teacher education majors, knowledge of current theories, methods and issues in foreign language education and professional journals and organizations/ sources; competency in critical thinking about those theories, methods, and issues; and successful practical application of their knowledge and skills in classes, clinical experiences and student teaching.

B. In order for the student to achieve outcomes that are consistent with the program's learning objectives and the departmental, college, and university missions:

1. each course uses the assessment tools listed in Spanish B.A. Curriculum Maps.
2. the Spanish section has approved the implementation of the following assessment tools to evaluate students achievement and progress in the program:
 - a. an oral proficiency interview for majors before they exit the BA program.
 - b. An exit content exam using some of the ISBE knowledge indicators as a starting point.
3. The Spanish section periodically assesses the success of the overall program based upon the learning objectives, responses from student evaluations, student feedback, professors' evaluations of courses and overall curriculum, and program review and it regularly makes improvements in the program by modifying the:
 - courses offered by the program
 - courses required for each degree
 - frequency with which courses are offered over a period of several years
 - general content of courses offered.

- extra-curricular activities and study abroad programs

Assessment Report for Spanish, April 28, 2004

Program Assessment Procedures for 2004

Assessment was carried out by the Spanish section. Given the size of this program, it appeared impractical to assess all elements of the program in a single year. This year's assessment focuses on issues identified in the most recent program review, and on all aspects of the 100 level courses, including placement and the co-curriculum as well as the individual courses.

Procedures:

1. Formulated curriculum map
2. Collected and analyzed data described below to examine achievement in areas identified by program review and of learning objectives in 100 level courses, including 111,112, 115, 116, 120.

This year's assessment was based on the following sources of data.

1. Recommendations for improving the program in the last Program Review.
2. Assessment of student achievement as determined by the various instruments used to evaluate each objective in each course (see curriculum map).
3. Student comments on the program from student evaluations.
4. Survey on effectiveness of the new online placement exam
6. Informal comments and messages to individual professors concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the program
7. Longitudinal statistics on enrollments
8. Comments from faculty regarding 100 level classes and the transition to the 200 level.
9. Mark summaries of grades given at the 100 and 200 level.

Given that this year's assessment focused on the 100 level, the following sources of data were judged to be more relevant to assessment of upper division courses: comments from cooperating teachers on the level of content and skill preparation of student teachers; scores of students on state certification exams; admission of graduates to M.A. and Ph.D. programs

Progress in addressing issues raised by Program Review

In general, the most recent Program Review of Spanish was very highly positive. It identified just three issues to be addressed. Only two of them are matters of program quality: offering students more career advice and planning to serve a growing number of heritage speakers, students who have already learned informal spoken Spanish at home.

Since that Program Review, the Department and the Spanish section have undertaken several initiatives in both areas. We now offer a formal career planning course, FOR 292, Career Development for Foreign Language Majors, taught by the departmental advisor, which provides students with career information

and instruction on job search techniques. In addition, each spring, in our New Horizons program, we invite our students to a panel discussion on careers featuring successful alumni, business leaders, and staff from Career Services. Finally, the section has designed and implemented a new course designed for social service professionals who need to learn Spanish for initial contacts with Spanish speaking clients.

To better address the unique needs of heritage speakers, a Spanish faculty member has designed a new course, Spanish 120, Academic Spanish for Spanish Speakers. That course, which builds on these students' strengths in informal oral expression and develops their command of formal and written Spanish, will be offered in the Fall of 2004. 120 will offer Spanish-speaking students an appropriate entry point into the Spanish major or minor, as well as an opportunity to develop their written skills to complement other career goals.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these measures in addressing student needs.

The third issue identified in that report is actually a consequence of the program's success: the need for additional instructional capacity to meet rapidly increasing demand. In comparison with the 1988 Review, the 1997 Program Review of Spanish reported a 14% rise in credit hours, a 42.5% increase in fall enrollment, and a 10% increase in first major degrees. It did not take into account the large number of second majors, who made up about 26% of the total number of Spanish majors at that time. In 1997, the Spanish program was averaging approximately 50 majors and 300 minors.

Recent increases have far outpaced those numbers. Spanish now serves approximately 100 majors and 500 minors, in addition to increased numbers of students from Bilingual Education, International Studies and other programs, including Elementary Education students completing a subject area requirement. As a consequence of vastly increased demand without a concomitant increase in instructional capacity, the Department has begun to limit admission to the Spanish minor through enrollment management. Last year, Spanish faculty voluntarily increased the maximum size of almost all of their courses. Although they stressed the value of small courses in development of language skills, and expressed an expectation that the increased class sizes would be a temporary measure; they understood that given the recent cuts in state funding the only alternative was to turn away even more Spanish students. Even with the increased class size, many Spanish courses now routinely fill long before the end of advance enrollment, and minors must often wait a semester or more to gain entry into their next Spanish course.

In 1997, Spanish was serving approximately 50 majors and 300 minors with 12 full-time tenure-line professors. In Fall 2004, the Spanish section will have only 9 tenure-line professors to serve 100 majors and 500 minors. As the figures indicate clearly, not only has Spanish tenure line faculty not increased since the last Program Review, that staffing has actually *decreased* at the same time majors have doubled and minors increased by 66%. Budget cuts are leaving multiple positions unfilled for several years.

As a result, the need for Spanish staffing is even more acute than it was at the last Program Review. In Fall 04 all first and second semester Spanish courses will be taught by graduate teaching assistants. All third and fourth semester classes will be taught by NTTs, as will four upper division courses. Graduate offerings have been scaled back.

Instructional capacity in the program will be partially made up by employing four full-time non-tenure track faculty members, at least three of whom will be voluntarily teaching overload courses in addition to their regular assignments. However, only two of those NTT lines are ongoing positions; the others are funded through variance dollars. Recognizing that NTT faculty and graduate assistants teach more students at lower cost than do tenure-line faculty, the section has supported a proposal to convert one of three vacant tenure lines to a combination of NTT and graduate stipends.

Despite all of these measures, access to Spanish courses at Illinois State is lagging far behind student demand. For instance, on April 12, 2004, before all on-campus students had registered and long before our 3000 entering first-year students had the chance to register, there remained only 75 seats in Spanish 111 and 15 seats in Spanish 112. This demand is projected to increase. State of Illinois projections indicate that the need for Spanish instruction will outpace supply through the foreseeable future.

Moreover, next year (Fall 05) marks the implementation of the College of Arts & Sciences language requirement. While many students will fulfill that requirement through high school study, students' greater exposure to Spanish in high school and understanding of the job market in nearly all career fields will mean that demand for additional on-campus language courses is likely to be greatest in Spanish. The Spanish section will continue to request that the Chair ask for permission to fill the vacant tenure lines and secure additional tenure lines for Spanish as funds become available.

Review of individual courses, with recommendations: 100 level

Because the Spanish program is so large in terms of classes and students, and because we are short-staffed in terms of faculty (we have three unfilled tenure-track lines), we have elected to focus on one course level at a time. For this year, our course-by-course assessment will focus on the 100 level. (This level is the same for students in teaching and non-teaching programs.)

Our assessment has been guided by the following three questions.

1. What is the present state of the program in relation to minimal and ideal levels of performance?
2. Where is improvement needed?
3. How can this improvement be brought about?

By and large, we concluded that with the new addition of Spanish 120 for heritage speakers, the current numbers and types of 100 level courses appear satisfactory; but that the specific structure of certain courses, particularly 115 and 116, was in need of some specific improvements. As noted above, the number of sections offered continues to fall well short of optimum levels, due to inadequate budgets at the University.

100 Level Placement

Because so many students study Spanish in high school or community college, and because programs vary so widely across the state, the section had long been dissatisfied with its placement of students solely on the basis of previous years of study. In 2002-2003, faculty in Spanish developed an online self-scoring placement exam to help students choose the correct level of Spanish at Illinois State. The exam is free and available 24/7 from any internet-connected computer. 2003-2004 marked the first year in which students were able to use this tool to help them with placement decisions. In fall the section surveyed a sample of students who had taken the online placement exam. While most indicated that they were satisfied with their placement, they did note some technical problems with the tests. Those problems have since been corrected. Some students also voiced concerns about a perceived lack of consonance between the test, which they found fairly rigorous, and the low level of expectations in their 115 classes. This last issue is considered at length below. Overall, the section is pleased with the results of the online placement exams, but will continue to survey students and monitor results.

111/ 112 First Year Spanish, I and II

These courses are taught by graduate assistants, under the supervision of the 100 level Language Coordinator, Prof. Montserrat Mir. As apparent on the curriculum map, the goal here is to introduce students to the study of Spanish language and Hispanic cultures. The approach is mainly communicative. In general, the results of student evaluations, mark summaries, and faculty response to students leaving these courses point to a satisfactory degree of achievement in all areas identified on the curriculum map.

115/ 116 Second Year Spanish, I and II

These courses are pivotal to the program for many reasons. The bulk of our majors and minors begin at this level, by virtue of high school language study. 116 (as well as 120) has recently been incorporated into the University General Education program. Ideally, in 115 and 116 students are moving on from the basic communication expected in 111 and 112 to an increasing complexity and accuracy in oral and written work. As indicated on the curriculum map, students in these courses are expected to progress in the areas of language competence, and cultural awareness, tasks begun in 111/112, and also begin to develop ability to analyze linguistic structures.

115 and 116 are typically taught by experienced NTT faculty with at least an MA. On the student evaluations, students in these courses generally report very high levels of satisfaction with the instructors'

enthusiasm, skill, and incorporation of cultural information. On the other hand, faculty who teach the 200 level courses that follow 116 have reported concern about lack of student preparation in the area of grammatical accuracy, and about students' expectations of high grades. Mark summaries of most sections of 115 and 116, as compared to the 200 levels tend to support such concerns. Nearly all students in 115 and 116 have been receiving As and Bs, while students in early 200s earn a high proportion of Cs and some Ds and Fs. Moreover, in the past few years there have been a small but growing number of student complaints on the 115/116 evaluations about the low level of expectations in terms of grammar. From all of these measures, it was becoming apparent that while 115 and 116 were meeting or even exceeding expectations in the areas of basic communication and cultural knowledge, they were falling short on two important areas identified in the curriculum map "...write the language grammatically" and "competency in analyzing the linguistic structure of Spanish."

In Spring of 2004 the section coordinator of Spanish formed an ad hoc task force of faculty and NTTs to consider how 115 and 116 might better prepare students for success in subsequent courses. Through examination of syllabi and from the comments of NTT faculty teaching the courses, it became apparent that a high proportion of the grade in 115 and 116 (15%) was being awarded on tasks that were purely "completion," without any form of quality control. For example, points were being awarded simply for turning in workbook pages, when the answers were printed in the back of the book, or for visiting internet sites. That 15% was potentially inflating grades by a full letter grade and a half, and giving students a means of earning high grades without paying attention to accuracy. In a series of meetings, the task force drafted recommendations to the section, including common syllabi that would remove those completion points, more attention to accuracy when grading written assignments, more rigorous rubrics for class participation, and a new textbook that would place greater emphasis on grammar. At the end of the spring, the section voted to accept the recommendations, which will be implemented starting in Fall of 2004. We will continue to monitor student performance in these and subsequent courses, mark summaries and student evaluations, to gauge the success of these substantial changes.

120 Spanish for Spanish Speakers This course is described above in the section on issues from program review. It will be offered for the first time in Fall 04, and we will offer a preliminary assessment next year.

Assessment of co-curricular activities as related to the 100-level

In 2002-2003 the Spanish section conducted a large-scale survey of student satisfaction with all elements of the program, including student awareness of co-curricular activities and levels of participation and satisfaction. From the results, it became apparent that while students who did attend the activities (such as Cineclub, viewing of a Spanish-language film followed by refreshments and discussion; Conversation hour, salsa and merengue lessons, poetry hours, and trips to local restaurants) reported high degrees of satisfaction, many students had been unaware that those options existed. As it happened, the survey itself served to inform many of the students. Since then, the section and Spanish club have taken extra steps to publicize co-curricular activities through such means as more frequent announcements in classes, posters and notes on the website. Participation has grown accordingly. We expect the awareness numbers to increase when we repeat our survey.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Spanish section has made significant progress in assessing and improving the program this year, starting with responses to Program Review and a focus on the 100 level. In coming years, assessments will focus on higher level courses, and on monitoring the progress of the initiatives reported here.
