Think   Engage   Create   Communicate   Apply

Assessment Practices and Plans of the French Program   **2010-2015**

Summary:

During the 2010/2011 academic year, when I stepped into the lead instructor position in the French program, the part-time instructors and I identified areas in which we wanted to improve our means of assessing our students in our First-Year program. During every department meeting since, assessment has been on the agenda, and we have gauged our progress and set the next goal.

In our Second-Year program, we had been using the same intermediate textbook for decades (*A Votre Tour,* published by Valette and Valette) and I knew I wanted to adopt a new one, but refrained from making the change until my second year as lead so as to focus on making improvements to First-Year French. We now use *Imaginez: le francais sans frontieres,* published by Vista Higher Learning, which has a strong cultural component based on authentic French language short films. As a result of this change, I had the opportunity to reevaluate and revamp the assessment tools used at this level.

Below is a snapshot of what our assignments currently look like in both our beginning and intermediate French programs:

Assessment in First-Year French sequence (FR 101, 102, 103)/percentage of final grade:

Chapter Exams and Practice Tests (30%), online workbook (10%), writing assignments (20%), oral presentation (10%), verb quizzes (10%), attendance and participation (20%)

Assessment in Second-Year French sequence (FR 201, 202, 203)/percentage of final grade:

Chapter Exams (15%), online workbook and quizzes (25%), two written essays (10%), language computer lab reading comprehension & vocabulary builder assignments (10%), weekly verb quizzes (10%), cultural project/small group oral presentation and written report (5%), final oral presentation (5%), attendance and participation (20%)

To assess both our first and second-year programs on an ongoing basis, we have regularly used an online test called the STAMP (STAndards-based Measurement of Proficiency) in FR 103 and FR 203 that measures students' proficiency using a nationally recognized rubric. We have recently completed work with Avant Assessment, the same company that created the STAMP, to create an online placement test.

In sum, in all of our courses we want to effectively measure our students' progress in attaining proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in French, and in attaining intercultural competence (ie. gaining knowledge of French and Francophone cultures as well as students' own cultural identity). We are constantly evaluating our assessment tools, and working to improve them, as we at the same time review our learning outcomes. We aim to strike a balance between formative and summative means of assessment.

Five-year assessment plan:

<u>2010/2011</u>

- **In FR 101,102,103: Assignment of online voice recording activities to develop and track student progress in developing oral proficiency (eg. listening comprehension, grammatical accuracy in speech, pronunciation, etc.)** This formative assessment-type activity provides students multiple opportunities to speak in a low-stakes setting (eg. at home or during open lab), and provides oral practice of the target structures and vocabulary introduced in each chapter of our textbook. These exercises build student confidence in speaking, and provide instructions with information about individual student progress that is otherwise difficult to come by in a large class.

- **In FR 103: Development of in-class, group oral presentation assignment**. Working with the Assessment Team's "Communicating Effectively" rubric as a starting point, a colleague and I created an end-of-term oral assessment tool that required research outside of class, collaboration with peers, and the creation of a PowerPoint slideshow to present several cultural aspects of a Francophone country (in groups of three). We modified the rubric only slightly to better fit the task and students' level of proficiency.

- **Development of hybrid component and online assessment tools for FR 101, 102, 103.** During that summer, instructors and I met frequently to create a strong online cultural component that would also assess students reading and listening comprehension skills, which had been lacking in our curriculum. Working within Moodle, we created an online quiz to test students' comprehension of the textbook's cultural videoblogs, an online journal with writing prompts based on the cultural and literary readings from the textbook to test reading comprehension and cultural knowledge gained (among other things), a phonetics component that required students to repeat and record phrases and tongue twisters online and to transcribe words and sentences using the phonetic alphabet, and an online forum within which students posted their answers to prompts based on the featured musician or group within a given chapter, which allowed for an online discussion of cultural differences, musical taste, etc.

- **Moving the First-Year French practice tests to an online format.** Another instructor and I, alternating chapters, recorded our voices reading aloud the audio scripts to all 15 chapters of the listening comprehension component of our exams with the help of ATC staff. The ATC created MP3 files of these that we then uploaded to our Moodle classes. We also uploaded the answer keys to the practice tests as PDF files. As a result, students now have access to the audio files and the answer keys from home, and we no longer need to use class time to do the practice exams. This is how we have created the class time needed to devote to the cultural components of our curriculum.

- **Addition of a cultural component to our first-year French chapter exams**. Until this year, we had often skipped all of our textbook's reading exercises, the music feature, and the videoblog,

which provided the bulk of its cultural information. They did not figure on our syllabus, and thus there was no assessment of culture or reading comprehension. Instead, we spent most of our class time focusing almost exclusively on grammar structures and vocabulary, and our chapter exams reflected this fact. To address this void, we infused our curriculum with all of these assignments, and added a section to our chapter exams to assess students' grasp of the new cultures studied. There are usually two multiple-choice type questions and one short answer response. We intend to improve these by requiring a longer written response that will encourage more critical thinking and reflection.

- **STAMP testing of students in FR 103 and FR 203**. The STAMP (STAndards-based Measurement of Proficiency) is a web-based test that assesses students' language proficiencies on a nationally recognized scale from Novice-Low through Intermediate-Mid, within the domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The STAMP is an adaptive test that reacts to the test taker's level of proficiency and automatically adjusts the difficulty level of the test items for each student. The STAMP allows us to utilize a common assessment rubric used nationally, and the data collected helps us to review our course expectations and student proficiency levels. Since STAMP is a proficiency test, students also get a clear picture of how well they can realistically use their language in real-world situations, in comparison with students at secondary and post-secondary institutions all over the U.S.

2011/2012

- **Revision of oral assessment in 103 and planning for comprehensive oral assessment the following year.** After receiving feedback from instructors and students on the previous year's oral assessment project, we decided to "work backwards" from the 103 task and create oral assessment projects for 101 and 102 that would prepare students for an oral presentation at the end of the first-year. We revised the 103 assignment to focus on material and tasks drawn from the textbook rather than on independent research on Francophone countries. We felt that this would better articulate with assignments we wanted to create for all three terms, allowing for better sequencing and scaffolding, since the speaking tasks would be anchored to the textbook's lessons. Although we began discussing what these might look like during department meetings, and had sketched out the tasks by our last meeting of the year, although we did not test students' oral proficiency this year.

- **Creation of new assessment tools for FR 201, 201, 203**. I began building this new curriculum from the ground up, which included creating new chapter tests, new oral assessment assignments, new writing assignments, and language computer lab assignments. When I realized that students were not getting enough grammar practice with what the new curriculum offered, I consulted with several book sales representatives and investigated individual grammar exercise books, finally deciding on one by spring term that we have been using ever since.

- **Creation of class cultural blog for Summer in France study abroad class**. Students studying in France during the summer of 2012 were responsible for keeping a record online of their

experience: culture shock, new words, new foods, impressions, cultural comparisons, and a photo journal. Each week for one month, three students were assigned this task. The end result was a fascinating mosaic of varied cultural reflections.

- **STAMP testing of students in FR 103 and FR 203**.

- **Development of online placement test.** Working with Avant Assessment, we began testing our students in one section each of FR 102 and FR 103.

2012/2013

- **Addition of oral proficiency summative assessment tools in FR 101, 102 and new assignment in FR 103.** I consulted with my former supervisor at the UO to create assignments based on material students were studying in their textbook each term, and a rubric for assessing these. The format is a small group that meets in the instructor's office, and each term the stakes are a little higher in terms of how the grade is weighted: 50 pts (5% overall) in 101, 75 pts (7.5%) in 102, and 100 pts (10%) in 102. (In second-year French, students present in front of the class.)

- **Recalibration of points between writing assignments and chapter exams.** To better align with the global learning outcomes in a foreign or second language course, we decided to assign equal credit to the writing assignments, in which students use language creatively to express personal views and experiences, and the chapter exams, which test mostly for grammatical accuracy. Before, chapter exams had been worth 50% of the final grade, and writing assignments less than 10%. Now chapter exams are worth 30%, and writing assignments 20%. (Both chapter tests and writing assignments are worth 50 pts, albeit the final exam is worth 100 pts)

- **Development of computer lab activities in Second-Year French sequence to assess reading comprehension.** One day a week, students read an article of their choice from an authentic French-language newspaper online. Afterward, they must summarize their article orally for a classmate. After students have had a chance to do this, I ask them to summarize in a sentence or two their classmate's article, and finally, I ask students what new words they learned during the exercise. Before class, I peruse all the headlines so that I have a sense of what the articles are about, and while students are reading, I scan their articles for the same purpose so that I can more accurately assess their comprehension during class feedback.

- **FR 201, 202, 203. Addition of cultural component on chapter exams to test knowledge of geography and culture gained from textbook cultural reading assignments.** Revising these tests—as well as the writing prompts on the exams and essays-- is an ongoing project.

- **STAMP testing of students in FR 203**. This test of 20 students closed the loop on this cohort of French students. We will begin testing the next one in the spring of 2014/2015.

- **Continuation of placement test development.** Testing of students in FR 102 and FR 103.

- **Development of new writing rubric for use in First-Year French sequence.** During the fall articulation meeting with College Now instructors, colleagues in French from the local high schools shared their means of assessing writing, and engaged in a productive discussion of what makes a good rubric.

2013/2014

- **Continuation and completion of online placement test**. After testing students in FR 201 in the fall, I met with Avant Assessment's consultant over winter break to help determine the cut scores. As a result this test is, practically speaking, normed to our curriculum. We began using the test winter term to more successfully place incoming students.

- **Creation of assessment tool for vocabulary enrichment assignment in language computer lab in Second-Year French sequence**. Beginning in the fall, I began requiring students to keep a vocabulary journal for use during the online newspaper reading assignment. I also provide a template to submit every three weeks, on which they define and use the new words or expressions in a sentence. This way I am sure that students are staying on task during our time in the language computer lab, and completing the assignment.

- **Development of honors option for Summer in France study abroad.** This year I drafted language describing what students taking FR 188/FR 288 with an honors option will be expected to complete for the course (eg. Reflective essay, videotaped interview with native-French speaking local). There are a few revisions remaining to be made.

Current assessment project in French:

Spring term, 2014

The French program has completed its initial stage of a longer term project to integrate the college's Core Learning Outcomes into its primary course documents and assessment tools.

This term, with the support of Kate Sullivan and the Assessment Team, my part-time colleague Valerie Metcalfe and I revised our syllabus/course information sheet in FR 101 to reflect the broader goals of a liberal arts education. These dovetailed nicely with the learning outcomes implicit in learning a foreign language, and therefore it was mostly a matter of changing the language of our course description to make these common goals explicit.

I view this project as a way to better prepare students for the challenges of college and language learning, which both require an openness to alternative views, a willingness to learn from mistakes, persistence in the face of difficulty, and the cultivation of self-inquiry. If students can be made aware of these global learning outcomes at the beginning of their French studies, their expectations of what

happens in a language class will better align with the reality of learning a foreign language. As a result, we expect that the rate of student success will improve.

To aid students, instructors and administrators in visualizing how the CLOs articulate with French outcomes, we also produced a rubric that maps these to each other as well as to particular assignments and means of assessing these outcomes in our first-year French sequence. These will be public documents posted to Moodle, and in the future, to the French program's website or program blog.

We are satisfied that the results have clarified 1) the inherent value of learning a foreign language, and 2) how Lane's French program, specifically, enables students to meet the learning outcomes at all levels and to gauge their own success.

Plans for 2014-2015

We plan to continue this same project of integrating the CLOs into our syllabi/course outcomes in all sections of our first and sequence year sequences. Likewise, I would like to produce a similar rubric mapping the CLOs to French outcomes for our second-year sequence.

In addition, I would like to improve our grading rubrics for writing in both our first and second-year sequences to better align with the college's Communicating Effectively rubric. We plan to work on these next year.

In our first-year sequence, we are considering adding a longer writing component to our textbook exams with a stronger focus on French and Francophone cultures. While students also write four short compositions a term outside of class, we believe that adding a timed, proctored writing exercise will improve our ability to assess students' writing skills and knowledge of French and Francophone cultures.

This fall, we will be offering our first-year French sequence in a hybrid format for the first time. I will be working on improving the online component and the means of assessment (eg. Online journal, forums, quizzes).

Finally, we are excited to adopt the newest edition of Vis-à-vis (6th), our Beginning French textbook, as it comes with a new online platform that includes an online adaptive learning tool, "LearnSmart." Here's a description of the latter from McGraw-Hill's website:

Overview

LearnSmart is an unparalleled, intelligent learning system based on cognitive mapping that diagnoses your students' knowledge of a particular subject then creates an individualized learning path geared towards student success in your course. It offers individualized assessment by delivering appropriate learning material in the form of questions at the right time helping students attain mastery of the content.
Assigned by you, or used by students as a study tool, the results are recorded in the Reports are as LearnSmart Results. This allows you to measure student progress at all times and coach your students to success. As an added benefit, all content covered in LearnSmart is tied to learning objectives for your course and competencies set forth by accrediting bodies so you can use the results as evidence of subject mastery. LearnSmart also offers a personal study plan that allows the student to estimate the time it will take and number of questions required in order to learn the subject matter.

Features

As a student works within the system, LearnSmart develops a personal learning path adapted to what the student has learned and retained. LearnSmart is also able to recommend additional study resources to help the student master topics.

In addition to being an innovative, outstanding study tool, LearnSmart has features for instructors. There is a Course Gauge where the instructor can see exactly what students have accomplished as well as a built-in assessment tool for graded assignments. Students and instructors will be able to access LearnSmart anywhere via a web browser. And for students on the go, it will also be available through any iPhone or iTouch.

- Diagnose: Student practice captures and reveals learning progress.
- Remediate: Personal learning paths automatically generate appropriate content based upon student knowledge level.
- Flexibility: Students access LearnSmart anytime and from anywhere using browsers or mobile devices such as the iPhone or iTouch.

Success: LearnSmart improves student performance and retention.

Instructors will need to spend a considerable amount of time learning to use these new online tools, so we plan to schedule a training session before fall term classes begin. I am confident that using the new technologies will motivate students to want to learn French, and therefore will be worth the initial investment of time and effort required of instructors. This is particularly true as we consider transitioning to a hybrid format in all classes of our First-Year French program. Currently we only offer the hybrid component during the summer intensive format.