

## DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

### ASSESSMENT

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures is to develop an appreciation for foreign language learning, helping students to acquire a range of linguistic skills and cultural competencies.

1. The study and mastery of a foreign language provides students not only with specific oral and written skills that may be transferred to other areas of academic pursuit but also deepens the awareness of their native language.
2. The knowledge of a foreign language is the key to the inquire into the culture, literature and society of countries and traditions other than one's own.
3. Becoming fluent in a language in today's global world serves students well in understanding cultural diversity and history while opening new opportunities for future careers and jobs.

#### DEPARTMENT GOALS

1. At the most basic level, courses 1, 2, and 3, the Department strives to bring each student to a satisfactory level of communicative competence both in active (speaking and writing) as well as passive (reading/listening) skills. Cultural competency is an equally important goal, which we attempt to create through language learning. See learning objectives below.
2. The Department strives to provide all basic course students with the adequate preparation for furthering their studies in foreign language, literature, and culture through an emphasis upon transitional courses (3.61, 4, 4.5, 4.6, 15.50) that offer the student linguistic competence in a variety of fields (literature, film, media, etc.). See learning objectives, below.
3. The most essential goal for those students who prepare to be middle and high school teachers (the majority of our majors) is linguistic and cultural competence. They must reach a high level

of command not just of the language but of the methodology of teaching that language. To this end, they must excel in advanced grammar and pedagogy/methods courses, at both the undergraduate and the graduate level. This being said, the importance of literature cannot be ignored, not just because these students will teach literature at the high school level but also because it is no infrequent for students to change their goal and apply to a Ph.D. program. See learning objectives below.

4. The Department must provide the Ph.D-bound student with a broad and profound background in literature, literary theory and criticism, and culture. See learning objectives below.

5. In sum, at all levels, the Department presents the student with options. Students who have fulfilled the basic language requirement will be prepared to advance to transitional or bridge courses, and, if they so desire, from those courses on to electives. Elective level students will receive the necessary instruction to be able to fulfill the major and apply for the Masters Degree and become middle and high school teachers. Majors and Masters candidates will be able to choose to apply to Ph.D. programs.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Language courses

At the most basic level, courses 1, 2, and 3, the Department strives to bring each student to a satisfactory level of communicative competence both in active (speaking and writing) as well as passive (reading/listening) skills. Cultural competency is an equally important goal, which we attempt to create through language learning. To this end, we must maintain the following learning objectives:

Language 1: By the end of this course, students will be able to conjugate and use the present tense, will develop a basic vocabulary strongly based in communicative skills, and will have mastered the concept of persons (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>) in its complex application to verbs and pronouns. They will be able to write simple sentences and paragraphs with a minimum of errors. They will be trained to work within the language, creating new sentences from others that they have learned rather than translating. They will be introduced to basic cultural concepts of the countries that speak the language they are learning.

Language 2: By the end of this course, students will be able to conjugate and use the rest of the indicative tenses that are used in current speech and writing. Their ability to write will be more advanced and they will be able to read more complex passages. Oral communication will have improved so that they can maintain basic conversations. Cultural competency will continue to a more sophisticated level, and, to the extent possible, language instruction will be coordinated with that cultural competency.

Language 3: By the end of this course, students will have mastered the subjunctive mood. They will be able to write short compositions, read non-complex texts or texts that contain many cognates, such as scientific texts, understand basic conversational speech, communicate in the

language, even if with expected mistakes, and have a basic knowledge of the culture of the countries whose language they have studied.

### Transition courses

By the end of the transition, or bridge courses, students will be able to understand movies and discuss them, comprehend newspaper articles, read non-complicated literary texts, write with a greater vocabulary and level of correction, and express themselves orally with greater confidence.

### Elective courses

The following is what students will be able to do upon completing classes in the different categories of elective courses:

1. Grammar courses: students will be able to demonstrate a high level of understanding of grammar: e.g., they will be able to explain grammar to middle and high school students, such as conjugations, vocabulary problems, uses of adjectives, and questions of communication and culture. They will be able to write compositions that will demonstrate a full comprehension, among other things, of the application of moods and tenses, adjectivization, special uses of pronouns, and the contemporary evolution of the language. They will reach an advanced level of stylistics.
2. Literature courses: students will be able to carry out textual, historical and contextual analyses of literature of the four genres (poetry, prose, theater, essay). They will also distinguish clearly the literary period(s) that may form the basis for the course. Students will also be able to explain the historical development of the four genres. Students will be able to analyze texts both orally in class and in written papers and exams.
3. Culture courses: students will be able to explain the history and culture of the countries whose language and literature are taught in the literature electives. They will discern clearly the affinities and differences between related cultures and historical periods, given that courses are devoted to both history and contemporary issues.
4. Methods course: students will be able to apply the methods of teaching foreign language and culture, including the utilization of current technology.

### Majors

By the end of their course of study, majors will display a proficiency in the knowledge of language, culture, and literature that will allow them to teach language in middle and high school. They will graduate with a solid vision of literary history and literary genres. They will achieve a level that will allow them to enter a masters program. Should they plan to continue on for a Ph.D., they should have a profound understanding of literary theory and criticism. To this end, Ph.D-bound students will have taken tutorials in the history of literature and criticism as well as in any essential subject that they may not have studied in other courses.

### Summary of objectives

In sum, upon graduation, students will be able to teach grammar efficiently using methods that are recommended by governing organizations (in this case ACTFL), explain literary and cultural concepts, express the diversity of cultures that exist worldwide, and succeed at the masters level, or, where possible, at the doctoral level.

Outcomes assessment report for Language 11.12  
February 20, 2007

Profs. Filer (Spanish 11.12) and Renner (French 11.12)

Objective #1: High level of grammar comprehension

The instructors of sections of this course reported that approximately 50% of the students met this objective completely; 45% met it satisfactorily; 5% failed to meet the objective.

Several methods were used by these instructors: compositions, translations, grammar drills, and reading for grammatical analysis. The comments of both instructors regarding these methods were very similar:

Of these four, writing compositions was the most valuable, because students had to focus on their grammatical mistakes while correcting them. Grammatical analysis of texts was not very helpful, because students have little or no background in this approach. They are often unable to distinguish the different functions of words and, therefore, seldom apply what is pointed at in a text to others of similar structure.

The first three all had great value: compositions, as the students self-corrected and had to think about fixing their mistakes themselves, translations thanks to the comparative approach, and grammar drills because certain automatisms were being developed; most valuable is hard to say; least valuable: reading for grammatical analysis, as the tendency to veer off into literary analysis was very strong.

Objective #2: Complex Compositions:

The instructors reported that approximately 60 – 75% met the objective more than satisfactorily; 25 – 40% met it satisfactorily.

Several approaches were used:

Compositions were corrected, mistakes were explained, rewriting was requested in case of too many mistakes.

For French 11.12, on the first version, the type of mistake was indicated and the student was expected to figure out the correction and hand in a second version. On the second version, remaining mistakes were corrected and explained.

Objective #3: Advanced level of stylistics:

The instructors reported that approximately 30% of the students met the objective completely; 25 – 40% met the objective satisfactorily, and 30 – 45% did not meet the objective.

The approaches used to meet this objective were the following:

A stylistic analysis of literary texts.

A peer editing process in the beginning stages of writing compositions. This was done in French but not in Spanish, where a large class and time limitations made this too unwieldy a task.

A discussion of stylistic implications of grammar.

As to why only 30% met the objective completely, the professors offered the following comments:

The group of students who register for 11.12 is far from homogenous. Heritage speakers with a high school education from their native country are able to benefit from an increase of awareness of the stylistic implications of grammar. The others, with a few exceptions, are students with limited formal training in the language, even if they speak it fluently, and are still struggling with basic grammar.

As the course is still a low-level elective, the focus had to be more on grammatical correctness given a) the diverse background of students and b) the fairly important shortcomings in the grammatical proficiency of virtually all students; style had to take a backseat for these reasons

## Outcomes assessment report for Language 17.50

June 8, 2007

Profs. [Barran (Russian 17.50)], Childers (Spanish 17.50), Huang (Chinese 17.50), and Mbom (French 17.50)

### Overview:

As compared to advanced grammar courses, such as 11.12 (see Profs. Filer and Renner's report from February 20 of this year), 17.50, "Landmarks of Literature," presents greater challenges to establishment of a common ground for outcomes assessment across the languages. On the one hand, this is due to differences among these literary traditions, which require a distinct approach for each class. At the same time, the relationship between the material covered and the methods of assessment used becomes more amorphous as we move into literary analysis and interpretation. Discrete competencies are harder to isolate; instead, objectives are integrated into an overall gestalt that can only be pulled apart through an artificial exercise. Despite these obstacles, we had a very interesting and, we hope, productive dialogue. We gained valuable insight into the conceptualization of the learning objectives, as well as having a unique opportunity to reflect on our own practice and learn from what our colleagues are doing.

Generally, we found that each assignment served to assess more than one objective. Sometimes we used the same method to assess all three of the objectives. In the course of our conversation, however, we did find that certain objectives corresponded more closely with certain methods, though there was never a one-to-one correspondence. On the other hand, the three [four] of us did not employ exactly the same set of assignments. It might therefore be helpful to clarify at the outset which types of assignments were used by which professor(s):

	[Barran]	Childers	Huang	Mbom
Weekly, open-ended writing assignments	?		X	
Bi-weekly, structured writing assignments	?			X
Longer, less frequent writing assignments ("papers")	?	X		X
In-class discussion	?	X	X	X
Oral presentations	?		X	X
Final exam	?	X	X	X

Differences in enrollment should also be taken into account. The fall 2006 section of Chinese 17.50 had 25 students; Spanish 17.50 this spring had 17; and French 17.50 this time around, spring 2007, had just 6 students. These differences had an inevitable impact on professors' respective abilities to monitor and improve student progress. This was most in evidence in the case of students who initially failed to meet an objective, since with a class of less than ten it is much easier to give them individualized attention than in a class of more than twenty. We thus cannot assume that assessment criteria, pre-existing levels or degrees of motivation of the students, or talent of the instructor are the sole

explanatory factors where differences in student success are concerned. Class size may also play a role.

Finally, before turning to the description of the outcomes achieved for each of the objectives chosen, a brief explanation of the choice of objectives to assess is necessary. In our current version of the grid, 17.50 aims to fulfill five objectives: 1) complex compositions; 2) textual historical contextual analysis; 3) distinguish literary periods; 4) explain historical development of genres; 5) historical and cultural competency. Even before the spring semester started, we agreed not to assess the first of these, since it is one of the main objectives for 11.12, recently assessed for French and Spanish. When we met and looked at the list of objectives for our department, we also decided to assimilate another, “distinguish historical periods,” to the third one listed above, “distinguish literary periods,” as we agreed that the two always go hand in hand in our classes, and indeed are inseparable. (We feel they should be consolidated in the grid, once and for all.) Finally, though several of us assessed the students’ ability to “explain historical development of genres,” that was not true for all of us, so we chose to leave that objective out and assess the following three:

**Objective #1 – textual historical contextual analyses**

**Objective #2 – distinguish literary/historical periods**

**Objective #3 – historical and cultural competency**

**Objective #1 – textual historical contextual analyses**

All agreed that this is the foundation for the other two objectives under consideration, but results varied from language to language. In French, by the end of the semester, 5 were doing better than good enough work in this area, and just one student was good enough, with none failing to meet the objective. The students in Chinese did not do quite as well. 7 were better than good enough, and 18 good enough, again with none failing to meet the objective. Professor Childers reported the poorest result, 5, 7, and 5. But he acknowledged having some difficulty making clear to the students what his expectations were, and blames this communication issue for the poor outcome.

**Language 17.50. Outcomes for Objective #1, textual historical contextual analyses.**

	[Russian]	Chinese	French	Spanish
Better than good enough		28%	83%	29%
Good enough		72%	17%	41%
Not good enough		--	--	29%

For all [four] three, in-class discussion was crucial for assessing this objective, along with written assignments. For textual analysis we agreed that discussing their assignments in class when they are handed back is particularly helpful. In Chinese, Professor Huang found short oral presentations useful for this objective as well. Professor Mbom stressed the importance of providing the students with a clear method for analyzing texts right



from the outset, building up from short, highly structured assignments to longer, more open-ended ones.

### **Objective #2 – distinguish literary/historical periods**

Though the students in French again produced the best outcomes in this area as well, the numbers were quite close to one another in the other two languages. In French, better than good enough, 4; good enough, 2. In Chinese, 7, 14, and 4. In Spanish, 5 more than fulfilled the objective, 9 achieved a satisfactory outcome, and 3 were unable to fulfill this objective satisfactorily. In percentages:

#### **Language 17.50. Outcomes for Objective #2, distinguish literary/historical periods**

	[Russian]	Chinese	French	Spanish
Better than good enough		28%	67%	29%
Good enough		56%	33%	53%
Not good enough		16%	--	18%

It is certainly suggestive that, in this case, results were so similar in the two classes with enrollment between 15 and 25, with significantly better outcomes for the class that had fewer than 10.

Again, in-class discussion is important for assessing this, as are regular writing assignments. But here, all agreed that the final exam is also a very important source of information on how well the students have achieved this objective. The focus here is not only on the discrete characteristics of each period, as exemplified in representative authors, but also on what Prof. Huang termed the “big turns” that define transitions between cultural periods. Most students are able to distinguish these periods well enough, but normally only a relative minority become really adept at it over the course of one semester.

### **Objective #3 – historical and cultural competency**

We had a fruitful conversation about this objective and what we were looking for when we assessed it. We agreed that it is the most complex and difficult to achieve, and that it truly becomes apparent only at the end of the semester how far in this direction students have come. Basically, it is their ability to synthesize what they have learned, reflect upon it, and “apply” it both in interpreting the past, but also in making comparisons with the present. Insofar as students are able to acquire this competency, we feel they will have gained a cross-cultural, trans-historical perspective that will always be useful to them. The capacity to abstract away from one’s own experience and background, inhabiting the values and worldview of another culture and then returning to view the present from another angle, are applicable in other situations and contexts. Students who master this will be well prepared to navigate cultural difference in today’s multicultural world.

Here again, French had the best results, perhaps due in part to the small class size: 4, 1, and 1. Spanish and Chinese had similar outcomes: 3, 9, and 5; and 5, 13, and 7, respectively. Giving the following percentages:

**Language 17.50. Outcomes for Objective #3, historical and cultural competency**

	[Russian]	Chinese	French	Spanish
Better than good enough		20%	66%	18%
Good enough		52%	17%	53%
Not good enough		28%	17%	29%

As far as method of assessing this objective goes, class discussion and writing assignments are important (Prof. Huang emphasized the value of open-ended weekly assignments), but above all it was the final exam where we saw how well they had achieved mastery. This objective, admittedly the hardest, produced the least impressive result, on the whole, with around one quarter of the students, across the languages, failing to achieve a fully satisfactory result. Of course, more advanced courses also aim at this objective, building on the foundation established during this semester.

**Conclusion:**

Despite differences in content and method, we found numerous points of agreement and overlap. To begin with, we clarified the objectives of the course, and agreed on the scope and significance of the three principal ones treated here. We also agreed, in a general way, on the crucial role of in-class discussion for all three of these objectives, but especially for the first, textual historical contextual analyses. And we all saw the crucial role played by the final examination in evaluating historical and cultural competency.

Where divergences exist, it may be possible for each to learn from the others. Certainly, the value Prof. Huang found in open-ended weekly assignments, even for the most difficult objective, is suggestive. On the other hand, for textual analysis, especially early in the semester, a more structured type of assignment, such as Prof. Mbom uses, may give better results. It appears frequent feedback, including in-class discussion of how the entire group performed, is preferable at this level to having just a few longer papers with the professor's written comments.

Each time 17.50 is offered in any language, an attempt should be made to compare the results with these, and continue to compile data on outcomes. When the course has been offered again in all the languages in which it is given, we will have a complete cycle to serve as a basis for comparison.

**Language 17.50. Comparison of types of assignments with objectives assessed.**

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Weekly, open-ended writing assignments	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Bi-weekly, structured writing assignments	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
Longer, less frequent writing assignments ("papers")	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	

In-class discussion	<b>X</b>	X	X
Oral presentations	X	<b>X</b>	
Final exam		X	<b>X</b>

An 'X' in **bold** print indicates that this type of assignment was especially useful for assessing that objective in at least one of the three [four] classes.