Spring 2014

French Discipline Assessment Report 2013/2014

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French Discipline
Assessment Report for 2013-2014:

Assessment Plan 13/14: The French Discipline will continue to focus on assessing the FL general education courses in 2013-2014. Doing so will:

1) allow us to structure the activity and incentives in such a way that students complete it
2) enable us to continue to adjust calibrations to suit our curriculum and the capacities of our students.

Our goal: According to UMM’s 2011-2013 catalog, the Foreign Language general education requirement has as its goal “to develop some fluency in the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a second language; and critical insight into another culture.”

Method of assessment:

• Three of the four skills mentioned in the description of the FL ged ed will be assessed with the aid of the WebCape placement test, recently adopted by UMM.
  o For each section of Fren 1001, the WebCape placement test will be administered at the beginning of the semester to establish proficiency level at the beginning of the two-semester sequence. This test assesses reading, grammar, and listening comprehension skills.
  o The same test will be administered at the conclusion of Fren 1002, and beginning and end-of-year scores for individual students will be compared in order to measure their progress. In addition, average scores for the classes will be calculated to assess a general level of achievement and progress.
  o Points will be assigned for taking both the pre- and post-tests as incentive for students to complete them and to make their best effort.

Assessment:

• The WebCape test was given to students prior to their arrival at UMM. These scores are indicated as their pre-1001 tests.
• The same test was administered to this group of students in December 2013, at the end of Fren 1001. These scores are indicated as their post-1001 tests.
• Finally, the WebCape test was administered at the end of Fren 1002, in May 2014. These scores are indicated as their post-1002 tests. (The test is always new to the individual student, questions are randomized and progressively more difficult: each correct answer leads to a more advanced question).

Results (Excel charts of the data are included as an addendum to this report):

• There was significant gain in the percentage of students taking the placement test between fall and spring semesters (76.6% of students enrolled took the test at the end of Fren 1001, versus 92.1% of students enrolled in Fren 1002). Keeping the percentage of students high is important for the validity of the results.
• Students showed significant improvement after taking Fren 1001, scoring an average of 131.59 prior to the start of the semester and 238.09 in December, an improvement of 106.51 points.
• Students did not show significant improvement after taking Fren 1002. The average score in May 2014 was 245.6, an improvement of only 7.51 points on the placement test.
• After Fren 1001, 9 of the ten individual students for whom scores are available improved their scores, while 1 student’s score went down.
• After taking Fren 1002, 12 individual students’ scores dropped, some significantly (over 100 points), while 15 students’ scores improved, some significantly (over 100 points).
These results indicate that, on average, our Fren 1001-1002 courses are doing what they are designed to do, that is, increase our students’ ability to understand and use the French language. Comparing this year’s results to those of 2012-2013, it is clear that the score patterns are very similar. The consistency in scores over the past two years demonstrates that students are making good strides towards achieving a score of 251, the threshold for testing into Fren 2001. This consistency also begins to establish a baseline for future comparisons.

Although the trend in the scores shows a marked average improvement in our students’ proficiency in French from the fall to the spring, this year’s assessment data again reveals that a significant number of our individual students’ scores decreased after taking Fren 1002. This anomaly was also noted last year: in May 2013, we speculated in our assessment report that these decreased scores were due to the fact that the students did not take them seriously, for which we had good anecdotal evidence. To counter that, the French faculty made the placement test a required assignment in the spring of 2014 and told students that the assignment would be graded on effort (if they took the test and did their best, they would receive full points for the assignment). Making the placement test a graded assignment did alleviate the problem of not getting a score at all (in the fall of 2013 only 76.6% of the students enrolled in Fren 1001 took the test, whereas 92.1% of the students in Fren 1002 took it in May), but it did not seem to fix the problem of declining scores. The French faculty again believe that the scores do not reflect actual learning, as some of the strongest students in Fren 1002 had scores that decreased. Some explanations may be:

- Students are still not taking the test seriously and just did what they had to in order to complete the assignment. To counter that problem, perhaps the score on the placement test should have more serious consequences. Their actual score could be part of their grade (i.e. testing into or above 2001 = 100%, with decreasing percentages if they did not make the cut into Fren 2001), or it could be required to place into Fren 2001 to satisfy the FL Gen Ed.
- Students may be suffering from placement test overkill. This would be especially true if they took the test prior to coming to UMM, again at the end of Fren 1001 and a third time at the end of Fren 1002.

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1 We began using the WebCape placement test in the fall of 2012, so we only have two years’ worth of data under this test.
• The WebCape placement test may be flawed, generating uneven scores for students. When we were trying out the test prior to its adoption, we had a very advanced student take the test multiple times and we did note at that time that his scores varied rather widely. This may be something the FL disciplines have to research. The fact that this test is used widely across the USA suggests that this is not the case, but other institutions may not be monitoring their scores.

• Teaching the play, *Voyageur sans bagage*, may be having a negative impact on placement exam scores, although it would ultimately improve their language acquisition overall. It is known in SLA theory that when students are pushed to use language above their current level of competence, their skills break down. (See the description of this phenomenon in the ACTFL scale level descriptions). Reading the play provides excellent authentic language and cultural input, but it may be causing the students to move momentarily backwards in their proficiency level.