

Assessment report

Department of German and Scandinavian

May 21, 2021

This year, due to the unexpected illness and medical leave of our Director of Undergraduate Studies, compounded by COVID-19 and other logistical challenges, we were not able to complete the scheduled assessment tasks we envisioned in our 2020 report (see attached).

However, for the coming academic year (AY 21-22), we would like to reboot our assessment initiatives by comparing our traditional and long-standing “German language, literature, and culture” major (the object of our prior assessment efforts) with our recently launched interdisciplinary German and Scandinavian Studies (GSST) major. GSST has proven very popular among students but requires less German than the traditional major, so we are particularly keen to learn whether it still turns out students with enough linguistic proficiency for us to be confident in the degree, and in particular what level of language proficiency should be associated with both of our degree options.

We will modify the methodology outlined in our existing assessment plan (again, described in the 2020 report) so that we can gauge the quality of the GSST major in terms of language proficiency and its other official learning outcomes. We will design the assessment in fall term and execute it during winter and/or spring.

This will coincide nicely with the launch of the School of Global Studies and Languages in AY 2021-22, in which new approaches to language pedagogy and assessment will be very prominently featured.

Ian F. McNeely

Professor of History

Department Head of German and Scandinavian

Annual Departmental Assessment Report

Department or Program: GERSCAN

Academic Year of Report: 2020

Department Contact Person for Assessment: Sonja Boos

Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report

German major

a. Language: Students should master skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing up to an advanced level, and become proficient users (C1-level) of German according to the internationally recognized standards and proficiency levels determined in the Common European Frame of Reference for language learning (CEFR).

b. Literature: Students should be able to identify, define, and illustrate with major works of literature the main concepts of literary analysis, in their forms specific to the German language traditions, including the major periods/movements (and their social-historical conditions), genres, and interpretive paradigms, as well as several main themes.

c. Culture: Students should be able to describe and provide examples of several main aspects of contemporary German culture, including governmental structures, major news media and periodical publications, and contemporary cinema, literature, and arts.

d. Critical Thought and Writing: Students should be able to write essays of 5-7 pages that argue fluently in a coherent, logical, and persuasive manner for independently developed interpretive positions on cultural artifacts of verbal and nonverbal form.

Section 2: Assessment Activities

As the Program review SERU 2016 - Academic Skills Department Results & Comparisons demonstrated, writing is presently the lowest ranked skill in our students' responses. Last year, we determined if students were meeting departmental learning objectives with respect to *d. Critical Thought and Writing*. Writing is a form of language production, and the ability to write effectively in a second language is part of communicative competence for L2 learners. This year, we reassessed our majors' writing skills, but with a special focus on grammar instruction and error correction. The assessment question was whether students are able to contextualize error correction within the recursive writing without however neglecting accuracy issues in the process. For this purpose, we implemented worksheets and personalized handouts designed to teach students to focus on serious and frequent patterns of written error. Our goal was to assess whether student writers developed abilities as autonomous editors of their own work. To assess this learning outcomes, we collected three papers from each student, one written for one of the students' first upper-division literature courses in the department, one from the middle stage, and a final one written after they had received additional composition instruction that emphasized formal grammar instruction and error correction. This allowed us to assess the progress they were making in producing grammatically accurate prose in the L2. The students were representative of our broader German major population in that they were at different skills levels when they entered the program.

Section 3: Actions Taken

The results of these assessments will be discussed at our first Faculty Meeting in Fall 2020, at which point there will be a report of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Department faculty will decide on appropriate actions taken, such as implementation of required writing and grammar workshops for majors, the development of grammar modules for content courses, or other pedagogical strategies that would allow for corrective feedback on learner errors when these arise in the context of writing.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience

We revised German 203 to focus more on critical thinking skills and leading students to question some of their own basic tenets while simultaneously developing language proficiency. We engage students on a much deeper content level than our traditional second year language curricula did. The redesign aims to train higher order critical thinking and research skills, which, via the study of languages other than English, help our students succeed in other University of Oregon classes as well. Classes now integrate a significant and complex German language play, into the curriculum to discuss in German from an early point on issues and questions of the human condition and to provide students with deeper insights and reasons why the study of the humanities beyond the Second-Year language classroom matters. During the discussion of the play our revised language sections use high-impact strategies to train research skills, increase students' academic readiness, expand critical thinking skills, and engage with questions of the humanities using active-learning pedagogies for the 21st century.

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

Our tentative assessment plan for the next two academic years (20/21 and 21/22) covers the two learning objectives that have not been the focus of recent assessments, namely: *b. Literature* and *c. Culture*. We will revise our current "German majors exit exam" and find a way to integrate it into our 400-level courses so that graduating majors are required to complete it. (In the past, many majors have failed to take the exam, which we asked them to turn in on a voluntary basis.) We will also develop a similar culture and literature curriculum assessment exam for students who are taking 300-level courses, so as to have a basis of comparison for student success and academic improvement. We are planning to further improve our students' educational experience by exposing first- and second-year majors to TTF faculty earlier in their careers and beyond our gen-ed courses. For this purpose, we are developing hybrid German/English courses, have language courses taught by TTF faculty, and schedule "guest appearances" of TTF faculty in lower-division lecture courses. We have been, and will continue to be able to absorb these course- and curriculum improvements with our current staff.