

Spanish Department Assessment Report (draft)

October 2003

Introduction

The revised Mission Statement of the Spanish Department reads as follows:

The mission of the Calvin College Spanish Department is to prepare students to serve in God's kingdom by developing proficiency in presentational, interpretive, and interpersonal communication skills in Spanish, by encouraging development of cognitive and analytic abilities, by deepening understanding of both Christian and secular world views, and by fostering cultural knowledge and appreciation of our global community. We seek to develop these capacities in the context of the following virtues, which are recognized for their special role in the life of the mind and the building of community: diligence, patience, honesty, charity (including hospitality), empathy, humility, and compassion.

In recent years our ways of assessing to what degree we fulfill this mission are:

1. A survey of all graduated majors every four years that asks them to rate specifically the usefulness of each component of the program in developing communication skills and other types of understanding and growth. There is a survey question for each phrase of the mission statement.
2. A three-part language proficiency examination in speaking (the Simulated Oral Proficiency Exam), writing, and the structures of the language (grammar) for all majors and minors who seek teacher certification. All three parts of the examination are to be passed during the junior year, and certification is not granted without a sufficient level of proficiency.
3. For the same group of education students, we receive after each round of tests the results of the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification, which include not only how each student fares in each section of the exam but also how their scores compare to those of all teacher education students statewide (see results, below).
4. The final examinations and course papers of our upper-level courses, while not quantifiable in the same way, yield evidence of the understanding of world view, the mastering of the tools for interpreting literature, historical documents, critical writing, and other cultural products. They also show to what degree the student has mastered the ability to articulate their own views in a way understandable to readers who are both native and non-native speakers of Spanish.
5. The recently instituted capstone course, designed to offer topics in the area of expertise of the professor assigned each semester, is intended to foster the integration of crossdisciplinary materials such as historical documents, films, visual art, and music into the area of study. This course aims to elicit from students a renewed appreciation of human courage and artistic integrity; a respectful, empathetic but critical response to social issues such as prejudice, injustice, crosscultural misunderstanding; and the articulation of that appreciation and response within class discussion and a final presentation and/or project.
6. Curriculum surveys conducted as needed among currently enrolled students serve to indicate their study programs and vocational goals and assist us in curriculum revision to help them develop understanding and cognitive and communicative skills pertinent to their particular course of study and service.

7. Evaluation of conversation group leaders by students every semester indicate the degree to which students were enabled and felt encouraged to develop their oral skills in a small-group setting in our core-level classes and the advanced conversation class.

Results

1. In the Alumni Survey of summer 2002 graduates rate the effectiveness of various aspects of the program with scores ranging from 3.09 to 4.97 on a scale of 1 to 5. Most scores are between 4 and 5. In most categories, the study abroad programs have received the highest ratings for aiding them in the achievement of each goal. Regarding the virtues there is considerably less consensus, most likely due to the fact that that language and some of the specific focus were integrated into our program either during or after their stint at Calvin. Additional comments and suggestions have contributed to our decision to offer new courses (see recent changes, below) and to consider restructuring our programs.

2. Results of the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification invariably show higher percentages in all categories for Calvin students as compared with other Michigan education graduates: mean scaled score, percent passing, and percentage of examinees with subarea scaled scores of 220 or greater (many or all questions answered correctly).

3. Curriculum surveys indicate a strong interest in Spanish for vocational purposes such as medicine and social services and in cultural studies as opposed to a predominance of literary courses. We interpret this as due partly to a strong desire to serve the Hispanic community in the United States and abroad.

Recent Changes

1. New or restructured courses:

a. The capstone course, Spanish 395, is currently being offered and is heavily subscribed. We await its completion to assess its culminative and integrative function within a student's program of study.

b. Business Spanish will now be offered during Interim and will alternate with Spanish for the medical professions and Spanish for social service professions.

2. The department has approved a proposal to combine Spanish 301 and 302 into a two-semester sequence in order to permit the mutual reinforcement of structures and oral skills at the third-year level. The curriculum committee is currently developing a proposal to the Educational Policy Committee regarding this integration of advanced-level language courses; considering a restructuring of the various programs; and revising the mission statement in the light of recently revised college mission statements.

3. Proficiency testing of teacher education students has been moved up in order to have them pass during their junior year; that together with the adoption of 301 and 302 as gateway courses promotes more focused attention to weak areas early in the college career.

4. All courses offered to teacher education students; that is, all Spanish courses, were scrutinized by our teaching staff as part of the state review in spring and summer of 2002. The way each goal is being met within each Spanish course was carefully laid out with reference to specific course goals and assignments. As a result we are much more conscious of expectations on the state level and how we meet them.

Challenges

1. We expect to restructure the curriculum of our major and minor programs in the next few years in response to alumni and current students' goals and concerns as well as in response to other assessment results.
2. The mission statement is currently being examined for possible revision.
3. We may adopt the new Texas oral proficiency test, which would involve the purchase of materials, but which would offer an exam preparation packet for the student; or we would consider a foreign language workshop with additional training for the currently used Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) in order to enable all full-time staff to rate student oral exams.
4. Our adopted Assessment Plan assigns reading and listening skill assessment to exams no longer available. We must revise the plan to correspond to currently feasible methods of evaluation.
5. We may consider revision of the plan in order to coordinate more effectively with NCATE and/or state criteria.
6. We continue to seek an effective way to assess all graduating majors in a cost-effective and humanly feasible way, since to date we have opted to assess the teaching majors and minors, who will affect the learning of future generations.

Some of the ways in which we hope to expand assessment capability may involve extradepartmental funding. For example, the Center for Social Research is developing new survey programs which may prove useful; we are seeking funding to offer short taped oral examinations to our core-level students; and training in oral rating, whether for the Oral Proficiency Interview, the SOPI, or the new Texas test, would necessitate some assistance. We also seek assistance from the Center for Applied Linguistics on occasion to rate a particularly challenging case. We expect to have a better idea of our needs as we narrow down assessment options.

Respectfully submitted,
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Spanish Department Assessment Committee