

ASSESSMENT PROJECT PROPOSAL
Spanish Program
Department of World Languages and Cultures

Submitted by:

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➤ **PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

We are requesting funding to develop a **new computerized Spanish placement test** to be used in two ways:

- a) As a placement test for incoming students.
- b) As an entry test to the Spanish Major.

The development of a placement test is **one step** in our overall assessment plan for Spanish Majors, which has been developed collaborative by faculty in the Spanish Program and is now in the first stages of implementation. The overall assessment plan is described in the next section.

➤ **PROJECT RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION:**

Placement Test for Incoming Students:

Currently over 400 incoming university students have taken the computerized Spanish placement test. This test, developed by the University of Iowa, has been used for over ten years, first in paper and pencil format, then in computerized form. Last Spring, the Spanish faculty reviewed the scores required to place into particular courses of the first and second-year sequence because there was some indication that the test was not placing students accurately.

A perusal of the scores obtained by the students in the placement test, and the subsequent grade that students had received in the course they had placed, suggested that perhaps students were placing in courses that were rather easy for them. In addition, as an initial step in the implementation of our Majors assessment plan, students in S311 (Spanish Grammar), one of our two entry courses to the curriculum for Majors, took the placement test. Surprisingly, only a few obtained the score required to test out of second-year Spanish even though they were doing well in the course. Upon close inspection of the test items, the Spanish faculty concluded that it was not a good match with our curriculum and that it did not test some aspects that we consider very important for success in our second-year and upper-level courses, such as comprehension of written texts. An added problem with using the Iowa test is that students are only allowed to take the test once, which excludes the possibility of using the test as a means to evaluate whether our entering Spanish Majors have achieved minimal linguistic competence in Spanish.

Entry Test for Spanish Majors:

The Spanish program currently has some 80 Majors, most of whom are transfers and students with previous study in the language elsewhere. So far we do not have any formal mechanism to test the language proficiency of students as they start the Major courses (300-level). The program has engaged over the last year in an effort to establish and assess clear program goals and student learning outcomes for its advanced curriculum (300 and 400-level courses). In articulating program goals and learning outcomes, we sought to be consistent with nationally established standards for foreign language learning, foreign language teacher education standards as well as with campus wide mission and principles for undergraduate learning.

We are making an effort to move away from assessment based on individual course performance towards a collective dynamic assessment model. We approach assessment as a positive force within a program leading to fruitful collective discussions among faculty on curricular and programmatic issues. Our approach for assessment seeks to engage program faculty in collaborative assessment of Majors and to create a symbiotic relationship between teaching and assessment as learners' progress is assessed through the program.

One of our five goals is that by the end of their course of study, students may be able to communicate in Spanish at least at the Intermediate High level of proficiency as defined by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. The proposed level of proficiency for students entering the Spanish Major is Intermediate Low at a minimum. In order to assess these communicative goals we are in the process of establishing entry and exit exams for Majors. Gathering data from students as they enter the program will enable us to chart how students develop their language proficiency over time towards the level expected by the program. A language proficiency diagnostic test will be given to students as they start the 300-level course sequence. The language proficiency test will consist of the following: a required score in a **language placement test** (for which this funding is being requested), a writing sample, and an audio recorded oral interview. The language placement test will be designed specifically to test the proficiency level recommended for entering the Spanish Major. The oral language proficiency of entering students as evidenced in the recorded interview, and the writing sample will be collectively assessed by the faculty during program meetings. Those students who are identified as not reaching an Intermediate Low proficiency level (as defined by ACTFL) will be contacted by their advisors and recommended to take appropriate course of action –attending free tutoring sessions and conversation hours, participating in Study Abroad Programs, etc.

The Exit Exam is incorporated in the Capstone Experience, which in our department is conducted as an Independent Study in which a faculty member and a student work closely together throughout the semester in the preparation of the student's portfolio, through which the student's discipline content knowledge and language proficiency will be assessed collectively by a Faculty Committee.

The changes we have carried out so far and the ones planned for the future represent our effort to improve students' learning as a result of our focus on assessment. These changes comprise program redesign and introduction of pedagogical innovations as well as reconceptualization and expansion of the role of the advisor and a better integration of the academic curriculum and learning outside the classroom (through community internships, service learning, and study abroad).

➤ PROPOSED SCHEDULE:

The new computerized placement test will be developed during Summer 2003, and will be ready to use in the Fall 2003. A final report will be forwarded to PRAC by October 1, 2003. A conference paper based on our experiences in the initial stages of implementation of our overall plans for assessment of Majors is being presented at two upcoming conferences: the Annual Conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics and the TESOL Annual Conference, both in March 2003. We plan to continue sharing our experiences in assessment of Majors with our professional colleagues in the form of conference presentations and published articles. In addition, we will continue to share our experience with our colleagues in the other language programs in the Department of World Languages and Cultures through presentations in department-wide meetings.

➤ BUDGET:

We are requesting \$2,000 for partial salary replacement for Amy Bomke and Ellen Brennan, who will work full time for a period of six weeks during Summer 2003 in the project. A School of Liberal Arts Teaching Grant (\$5,000) is also being requested for this project in order to supplement the lecturer's salaries.