

Section V: Use of Assessment Results to Improve Candidate and Program Performance

As mentioned in our Section I Narrative, the NCATE review process finds the Modern Language Department at Keene State College in the midst of a major transition to a new four-credit system, which necessitates a complete re-structuring of our French and Spanish majors. Those changes will take effect in fall 2007, coinciding with our analysis of the results of the new assessments outlined in this report.

While this report reveals that we are in the early stages of establishing a clearly articulated, systematic program of assessment, it is worthwhile to note that we have previously gathered two sets of significant data. For the New Hampshire state accreditation review carried out in 2005-2006, we collected samples of student work products relevant to most of the ACTFL standards. However, because the state examines our program holistically, we gathered work samples from all students in a given class, regardless of whether or not each student was pursuing teacher certification. Second, during the same past year, Modern Languages also underwent an internal Program Review mandated by the trustees of the University System of New Hampshire. That review included a survey of graduates over the past five years. Highest praise accrued to our study abroad programs. Most graduates who were actively using their language skills expressed a high degree of satisfaction, and nearly all who sought teaching positions were successful. Many of those teachers had also begun graduate degree programs.

1. Content Knowledge

We anticipate that our students will perform adequately on the Praxis II tests, and on the Oral Proficiency Test, an expectation grounded in our long-standing requirement that they spend a semester abroad. We have already become aware, however, that they need more formal work in grammar during their junior or senior year, and have implemented an Advanced Grammar course in Spanish, which will now be required of all majors. The French program, which enrolls fewer students, has not created a new course, but will include more rigorous grammar instruction in the 316 Composition course, in 405 Contemporary Usage, and in the 495 capstone course. As these courses transition from three to four credits apiece, additional instructional time can be devoted to areas of need.

Data gathered through Assessments 1 and 2 will also reveal any shortcomings in student preparation in literature and culture. Both French and Spanish majors include an Introduction to Literature course, 303. It is desirable that majors continue significant coursework in literature and culture during their semester abroad. Yet given the wide latitude for student choice of programs, and their freedom to choose virtually any courses totaling 12 credits, there is no certainty that students in fact do broaden their familiarity with literature and culture through coursework abroad. A critical analysis of our new assessments may necessitate introducing more explicit requirements for the coursework taken abroad.

2. Pedagogical and Professional Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

While Keene State College has regularly evaluated the classroom performance of all student teachers, it is now revising clinical observation forms for evaluating their pedagogical and

professional knowledge and skills. It is now in the initial stages of developing a systematic process to evaluate dispositions. ESEC faculty have become aware that such a system needs to assess the suitability of candidates for the teaching profession at the earlier stages (i.e. before they begin student teaching).

Further in the process of professional formation, our teacher education program in Modern Languages has paid little attention to the need for candidates to develop ongoing plans for professional development. As a first step, however, we have modeled commitment to ongoing professional development in several ways. Our faculty founded the local college-K-12 teacher's collaborative group, Pizza and Pedagogy, which meets five times per year on campus. Teachers share cultural and travel information, activities, and materials.

Modern Languages faculty also serve on state boards reviewing teacher certification programs at other institutions, and within organizations responsible for updating and revising teacher certification standards. In this way we model familiarity with state standards.

Our faculty also serve as officers in the state language teachers professional association (New Hampshire Association of World Language Teachers) and contribute frequently to its programs. The College has just created a fund to pay student expenses for attending state and regional conferences such as NHAWLT.

Now we must take the further step of clearly connecting our candidates with this professional network during their Methods and student teaching coursework. A key factor here will be the appointment of a new faculty member in Spanish and Methods who can bridge the gap between the Modern Languages and Education (ESEC) departments.

3. Student Learning

Our present information about candidate effect on student learning is anecdotal at best, some of it gathered from reports of our graduates' success in the classroom as they begin their post-graduation teaching assignments. Thus far we have systematically assessed candidates' preparation for and delivery of instruction, without taking the further step of evaluating what K-12 students actually learn. This will be a critical areas as we evaluate the results of the newly designed assessment instruments included in this report.