Assessment Review- Foreign Languages (Spanish)

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I. Evidence of Meeting Assessment Outcomes

In my Spanish classes, there are a number of different assessment tools that contribute to an overall vision of our students’ linguistic capacities. For one, they are obliged to complete written examinations and quizzes that assess their grammatical competence; these evaluations also incorporate aural components in the form of dictations for first- and second semester classes. In addition, students at the elementary level of my Spanish courses further demonstrate their writing abilities by creating compositions of one to two pages on topics related to their lives, such as the presentation of a friend and a brochure of an interesting community in first- and second semester Spanish, respectively. In my advanced classes of Latin American Colonial and Women’s Literatures, as well as my Conversation and Composition courses, the students also practice their written capabilities on tests including short answer and essay questions. Outside of class, all of these advanced pupils produce final essays, which are based on written abstracts discussed in my office before midterms.

As for aural and oral assessments, students at all levels of my classes are engaged in informal interchanges on a daily basis during the first ten minutes of each period. While these interchanges are not assessed in a qualitative manner, they do serve as practice for future examinations in all cases. For example, both first- and second semester courses culminate in a ten minute oral interview with each student in which their oral skills are judged according to fluidity, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary use. In my advanced classes, students give short presentations to their colleagues on topics related to the reading of the day;
this allows for pupils to not only showcase their oral proficiency but also learn from one another’s unique perspectives in an oral format.

II. **New Knowledge Learned from Assessments**

These assessment tools have impressed upon me the importance of not isolating linguistic capacities to certain courses. To wit, our Conversation and Composition classes should not represent the only opportunities for speaking and writing structured essays, while our first-fourth semester language classes must resist an exclusive focus on rote grammatical memorization and isolated lexical and verbal production. Moreover, the advanced courses on Spanish and Latin American Literatures need to avoid the temptation of embracing reading and writing to the point of excluding oral and aural contributions almost completely.

As a result of these assessments, I have also observed the pressing need for increasing our grammatical concentration in the program as a whole. With the Praxis Test a fact of life for our Education graduates, it is of paramount importance that our Majors and Minors alike receive a more extensive exposure to Advanced Spanish Grammar, perhaps in the form of a future course for fifth-semester students. While I do utilize our Conversation and Composition classes as a means of incorporating these difficult concepts, the titles of these offerings do not leave room for this narrow grammatical focus. Furthermore, I have realized that our Spanish students need to be prepared to tackle concrete tasks in the target language rather than be subjected to a standardized list of desirable grammatical topics; the former goal would cultivate pupils capable of applying concepts to practical study abroad and professional situations in the future.
III. Changes Resulting from Assessment

After imposing these tools for assessment, I am spending more time weaving all four linguistic capabilities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) into all levels of our Spanish program. Due to these grammatical challenges, moreover, I am in the process of compiling a supplemental grammatical review available to my advisees before taking the Praxis Examination for their teaching licenses. Opportunities for assessment of oral, written, reading, and aural capacities are not lacking in these classes, but the application of these linguistic skills to real-life tasks needs to be considered on a more consistent basis. Therefore, I am instituting more concrete chances for my students to transfer these in-class lessons to extra-curricular contexts, such as writing brochures in my second-semester class, extending the opportunity to participate in a scholarly conference at Viterbo University during the spring 2010 semester (which was unfortunately not accepted by any members of my current class on Latin American Women Writers), and creating children’s books utilizing targeted vocabulary from my Conversation and Composition course. Finally, I am planning to propose an Advanced Spanish Grammar course to the LAE Curriculum Committee in order to address these specific program-wide grammatical deficiencies in the future.