



Department of Scandinavian Studies

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To: Dean Yvonne Ozzello

From: Susan Brantly, Scandinavian Studies Chair

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "SB", written in a cursive style.

RE: Assessment Reports

Date: March 25, 1998

Attached you will find our assessment reports for both the undergraduate major and the M.A. and Ph.D. programs.

I hope they conform to your expectations.

DEPARTMENT OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES

Assessment Report for the Undergraduate Major

Abstract:

Through the use of exit interviews, embedded testing and the review of student papers the Scandinavian Department has sought to ascertain whether its undergraduate majors are attaining a satisfactory competency in a Scandinavian language, a proficiency in writing the English language and an ability to read critically. The direct indicators of embedded testing and term paper review have shown that our students are meeting our expectations. The exit interviews indicate that the students themselves perceive that their language skills and their writing and critical ability have improved. In general, these interviews express satisfaction with our program. The exit interviews also informed us that more of our majors than we perhaps realized attend the Oslo Year Program, giving us added impetus to formalize our relationship with that program in order to facilitate the transfer of credits.

Assessment tools used:

Direct Indicators: Embedded Testing, Review of Term Papers

Indirect Indicators: Exit Interviews

Narrative

During the past year, undergraduates have been sent an exit interview via email just before they graduate. Our response rate is around 60%, which we consider adequate.

The Scandinavian Major is designed so that students must take at least one course in the three basic areas of knowledge in our discipline: 1) medieval studies or linguistics 2) history or contemporary political issues 3) modern literature. In one exit interview, a student who described himself as enthusiastic about medieval studies, remarked that taking a course in modern literature turned out to be one of his most valuable experiences: "Strindberg wasn't really what I was interested in at the time, but it grew on me." We consider gaining a variety of intellectual experiences in our discipline important, and the students seem to confirm that our strategy of making them distribute their courses is beneficial.

At one point we considered asking majors to compile a student portfolio, so that we could

gain an overview of their undergraduate careers. This proved impractical, since we found that many of our majors declare just before graduation, making it difficult to assemble the necessary materials. Moreover, student response to this prospect was lukewarm. Instead we will rely on student G.P.A. to indicate whether students are making satisfactory progress through the requirements.

Further significant information from the exit interviews, includes the frequency with which our majors attend the Oslo Year Program. It is certainly in the program's best interest to establish an official relationship with the Oslo Year Program, so that our students derive full credit advantage.

A few years before this assessment exercise, the undergraduate advisor noticed that some papers being turned in for the English Proficiency requirement showed unfortunate weaknesses. Since the students handing in the papers were poised to graduate, there was little that could be done retroactively. Faculty in the department were urged to pay special attention to the writing assignments of undergraduate majors in their classes, so that we might work on improving the writing skills of our students before graduation. Now that the assessment procedures are in place, it appears that this effort has been rewarded. No papers handed in for the English Proficiency requirement have shown significant weaknesses. The exit interviews indicate that our majors have written between 4-6 term papers before graduation, and several identify the papers they wrote for classes as their most valuable educational experience. Now that several of our 400-level courses are being made into Comm-B courses, we expect undergraduate writing to improve even more.

For the purposes of this assessment exercise, we elected to concentrate on assessing our majors' language skills by including an embedded essay in instruction during the fifth semester. Since we are a small department with limited resources, this seemed most expedient. We rely on the instructor's assessment of the students' speaking and listening skills, since conducting a department-wide test of these skills would be too time-consuming. Our 5th semester students show a basic proficiency in their target language, corresponding to the "advanced" level of the ACTFL Guidelines: A student with "advanced" skills can: "write routine social correspondence and join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics. Can write simple social correspondence, take notes, write cohesive summaries and resumes, as well as narratives and descriptions of a factual nature."

This report has been discussed and approved by the faculty of the Scandinavian Department.

Respectfully submitted March 25, 1998,



Susan Brantly
Scandinavian Studies Chair

DEPARTMENT OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES

Assessment Report for the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs

Abstract:

Both of our M.A. and Ph.D. programs require comprehensive examinations, which enable us to evaluate the depth, breadth, and sophistication of student learning under our tutelage. Moreover, the Ph.D. dissertation is a fairly clear indicator of a student's level of expertise in their field of specialization. Until recently, however, we have had no mechanism in place to gauge the student's own impressions of their educational process. Beginning 1996/97, we began conducting exit interviews with our graduating students. These exit interviews confirm that the series of courses under the heading of "Survey of Scandinavian Literature" is the most valuable aspect of our graduate curriculum. Students have expressed a desire for more teaching opportunities and more supervision of student teaching. Further, students would like more writing assignments to be given in the students' target language. The department is currently considering ways in which we might accommodate these requests.

Assessment Tools Used:

Direct Indicators: Local Exams, Review dissertations

Indirect Indicators: Exit Interviews

Narrative:

Since we began conducting exit interviews, the response rate has been 100%.

On the bright side, our students have particularly valued our seminars and the "Survey of Scandinavian Literature" series. They also have welcomed the opportunity to teach 5-week modular courses, at the same time that they wish there were even more teaching opportunities. One of our Ph.D. graduates, who is currently employed teaching Scandinavian literature, confirms the usefulness of our pan-Scandinavian approach in preparing her for teaching professionally.

There is a sense, however, that our graduate students are sacrificed somewhat to the departmental need to do so much undergraduate teaching. Students would like more seminars, and particularly courses which could be taught in a Scandinavian language. One student desired more supervision during her time as a Teaching Assistant.

In the light of these suggestions, the department is considering the following measures:

- 1) Some Scandinavian-language papers should be assigned in Survey and in the 400-level literature courses.
- 2) Faculty should be encouraged to offer 710 (5-week) special topics courses in a Scandinavian language.
- 3) Teaching Assistant training and supervision should be improved along the lines suggested in Anne-Marie Andreasson's report to the department. (Attached)

This report has been discussed and approved by the faculty of the Scandinavian Department.

Respectfully submitted March 25, 1998,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Brantly".

Susan Brantly
Scandinavian Studies Chair

Training of Teaching Assistants

The following is a proposal for a more structured program to train TAs in Scandinavian languages. Both Tanya and I have spent much time advising TAs this semester and we are pleased with the quality of the classes taught and with our program in general. We also believe that we would be able to accomplish much more in the area of advising if we had a more structured training program. Such a program would also provide continuity and enable us to maintain our standards even in years when we have inexperienced TAs. Finally, the new contract with TAs will probably explicitly mention training as one of the department's responsibilities.

This proposal is based on some of the ideas presented at the Conference for Less Commonly taught Languages, which was held in Madison in October 1997. It is based on three main points, which were discussed at some length during the conference.

1. How to do more with less: it is important to recognize that most programs in LCTL cannot expect their resources to increase significantly, and yet if those programs are to survive, they must grow. It is therefore necessary to take maximum advantage of existing resources. For us, it means that this training program is designed to use what we already have in our department and on campus, and should not involve extra cost.

2. The use of modules creates greater flexibility, so that one program can be tailored to specific needs and existing resources can be incorporated more easily.

3. Training must be on-going. Research shows that punctual efforts in teacher training have little lasting value.

I therefore propose to utilize the resources of our own department and of other departments on campus, rather than designing new courses, and to divide the various parts of the program into punctual and on-going modules.

A. Punctual Modules: four different components, some of which (for instance, the observations) already exist, but are expanded.

- 1. A half-day workshop** in the department at the beginning of the semester. The following topics should be covered by faculty members:

The Scandinavian languages program at the University of Wisconsin: goals and expectations at various levels (cf. Sue's report), departmental guidelines on absences, grading and evaluation of students, assessment of TAs, and various administrative points.

Introductory lecture on Language Learning and Language Acquisition: current pedagogical trends in the field, basic reference bibliography. (Tanya)

How to identify resources (materials and people):

using reference works for grammar, semantics, pronunciation etc.
(Kim)

incorporating culture in the language classroom: what does it mean, how is it done. (Niels)

discipline (Sue)

2. The two-day Romance languages workshop: is geared towards language pedagogy.

3. Use of the Multimedia Teacher Training video developed by Richard Young and Hugh Bishop in the English Department, and Sally Magnan in the French and Italian Department. This CD-ROM-based training program was designed to train people in ESL, but the principles are applicable to any language. The program allows novice teachers to watch and analyze lessons taught by master teachers, and also guides them in the preparation of lesson plans.

The video should be watched over several weeks (it is a comprehensive training program, not just a one-hour video) in conjunction with the practicum, see below.

4. Methods Course. I think it is important for inexperienced TAs to take a methods course. This should be required. In order to avoid extra cost, I suggest that TAs take a course already offered in another department.

My first suggestion would be the methods course offered in the Slavic department by Prof. Rifkin because he is a specialist in teacher training (he wrote his dissertation at the U of Michigan on that topic) and he has experience teaching a Less Commonly Taught Language.

If Prof Rifkin agrees to cooperate with us, the course should be taken for credit under a Scandinavian call number, and practical assignments would be done in the appropriate Scandinavian language under the supervision of one of our own faculty members.

5. Observations. New TAs should observe an experienced teacher for a week at the beginning of the semester. They should observe someone teaching at the same level they are. If these observations cannot be arranged in our department, we might be able to work with experienced teachers in other department, since the focus of the observation is teaching methodology and pedagogy, not a specific language.

TAs should be observed at least once a semester, for TAs with little experience, one observation at the beginning of the semester and one at the end would be even better.

These observations should be part of the trainee's professional growth and teaching portfolio.

B. On-going Modules

As mentioned in the introduction, it is essential to have on-going training, because research shows that punctual efforts do not have much impact on teaching. The on-going part of the program consists of two modules.

1. Practicum. A weekly, one-hour practicum to be attended by all TAs and preferably by all lecturers. Each week should concentrate on one topic, such as syllabi, lesson plans, exams, special topics in grammar, listening comprehension, writing comprehension, teaching writing, etc. and be coordinated with the video. The focus of these sessions should be on the rationale behind teaching. They should also be very practical, so that on the day that lesson plans are discussed for example, each TA should bring examples of their own work for discussion.

We have also been given permission to use the pedagogical packet from Seattle for this practicum.

2. Independent study. In my advising this semester, I have often felt the need for instructors to have a wider perspective on their work, on the language as a whole, on their aims for a particular semester, and on the textbook.

For example, when planning a lesson on the future tense, one should already have a good understanding of the verbal system as a whole and of how it differs from English. One can then focus on “how to teach” not “what to teach”. One should also understand how and why the textbook uses dialogs, pictures, texts etc. for a particular unit, so that the textbook and supplementary materials can form a coherent pedagogical whole. This takes time, and is more efficiently achieved if there is some structure to the learning process.

It is also important for instructors to understand the difference between aims and means to attain those aims. For example, one does not use video for the sake of having a video, but one can have specific activities using a particular video to learn a specific point, or to work on a specific skill. To be able to do that one needs an overall pedagogical plan.

Ideally each TA should work with a faculty member in their own language to research special topics. Enclosed is a list of some of the topics that should be covered. This is the most long-term aspect of the training, and should give instructors the means to continue with this throughout their careers.

November 24 1997
Anne-Marie Andreasson