

DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

College of Letters and Sciences
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT OF RUSSIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Introduction

In the fall of 1994, the College of Letters and Sciences informed all Departments and Programs of the necessity to develop an assessment plan in each undergraduate major and in graduate education by December 31, 1996. In a memo dated September 21, 1996, departments were encouraged to develop an assessment plan to focus on one part or aspect at a time.

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures regularly provides instruction for undergraduate and graduate students in Russian language and literature, Polish language and literature, Serbo-Croatian language and literature, Czech language and literature, and Central Asian languages and literatures. Most, but not all, of the graduate students enrolled in department courses are enrolled in the M.A. or Ph.D. program of the Slavic Department; some of the undergraduate students enrolled in Slavic Department courses are pursuing a B.A. in Russian language and literature, while others take Slavic Department courses to fulfill general education requirements for the bachelor's degrees (e.g., the foreign language requirement or humanities requirements) or to fulfill requirements for the major in International Relations with a concentration in Russian and East European Studies.

The proposed plan is a true experiment: we hope to learn from both our successes and failures. Since the plan is an experiment, much like the programs it reviews, it may change in the future.

The proposed plan focuses only on undergraduate level language instruction in Russian, as that is a significant part of the Slavic Department's course offerings and enrollments. Russian language instruction in the first- and second-year courses (Slavic 101/102 and 203/204) regularly attract some students interested in fulfilling only the foreign language requirement for the College of Letters and Sciences. Third-year Russian (Slavic 275/276) is required for all students majoring in Russian as well as those majoring in International Relations with a concentration in Russian and East European Studies. Fourth-year Russian (Slavic 321/322) is required only for those students majoring in Russian. By assessing language instruction at these different levels, we will assess the degree to which we serve the needs of some of the different kinds of students taking courses in our department.

Educational Goals and Objectives

In Fall 1992 the Slavic Department convened a "Goals Committee," consisting of faculty members (Bailey, Kramm, Marquess and Rifkin), graduate student teaching assistants (Conrad and Ungurianu), and undergraduates (Mathews and Neiderstadt), to review Russian language instruction. It should be noted that committee members included both native speakers of Russian and English. Members of the committee visited Russian language classes at all levels of instruction, spoke with students and instructors and examined instructional materials and examinations. After some discussion, the committee drew up a statement of goals for each level of instruction and a series of recommendations, described in a report dated January 7, 1993. At a department faculty meeting in the Spring 1993 semester, the report of the goals committee was discussed, the goals adopted, as well as some, but not all of the recommendations.

The expectations and goals for the end of second-year Russian (Slavic 204) for writing and speaking were listed as sentence-length discourse (expectation) and paragraph-length discourse (goal), focusing on topics related to the student him- or herself (interests and opinions). Students were to be encouraged to take linguistic risks for the sake of creative use of the language and to discuss learning strategies and language processing strategies. Goals for this level for listening and reading focused on skimming (gisting) of texts and scanning (for particular details).

The goals for the end of the third-year course (Slavic 276) for writing and speaking were identified as paragraph-length discourse on topics beyond the student him- or herself, and for reading and listening with some textual analysis and the recognition of irony.

The goals for the end of the fourth-year course (Slavic 322) in writing and speaking were listed as extended discourse (essay length) on topics beyond the student him- or herself, and for listening and reading for detailed textual analysis.

With respect to questions of accuracy, the Goals Committee reported that students should review the basics of grammar in the beginning of both third- and fourth-year Russian courses in light of the fact that many students forget grammatical rules over the course of a summer away from their language studies. The Goals Committee recommended the implementation of 2-step peer editing of writing assignments beginning as early as the first-semester of language instruction, with the first step focusing on meaning, the second on accuracy.

While the Slavic Department has not yet established a list of goals for the study of languages other than Russian, instructors of those languages may find the goals listed in the January 1993 report acceptable. The Slavic Department is presently developing an articulation of the goals for instruction in literature, whether in the original or in translation, since such an articulation is prerequisite to the development of an assessment plan of this aspect of our Department's offerings.

Instruments and Methods for Assessment

The Department has many ongoing assessment activities, including records of grade point averages in various courses, student evaluations of courses and faculty, and so forth. There are tight feedback loops for assessing individual students and faculty members, but the usefulness of this data in program assessment has not been explored. The data produced by the assessment measures described below is intended to provide the Department with information about successes and about needs for change; it is not intended to evaluate individual students or faculty.

1. Capstone Evaluation

Students completing a major in Russian will be asked to complete a questionnaire about the program as a whole during the semester in which they take Slavic 322 (eighth-semester Russian). A follow-up questionnaire will be sent to graduates with a B.A. in Russian three years after they receive the B.A. Drafts of these questionnaires are included in Appendix A to this plan.

2. Departmental Testing

The Slavic Department will test a random sampling of students in fourth-semester Russian, all students in sixth-semester and eighth-semester Russian with an instrument designed to assess grammatical and syntactical competence in Russian on an annual basis for the next three years. After that point, this test will alternate with tests of reading and listening comprehension in Russian.

3. National Testing and Standards

The Slavic Department faculty includes an ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) certified tester of Oral Proficiency in Russian, Benjamin Rifkin. Rifkin will conduct oral proficiency interviews with two randomly selected students in fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-semester Russian every year to assess the range of oral proficiency outcomes for the program in comparison with national studies of oral proficiency (such as Carroll's 1967 study of the oral proficiency of foreign language majors and

Thompson's 1996 analysis of the proficiency of students of Russian in all four language modalities.)

4. Portfolio Evaluations

For those undergraduates majoring in Russian language and literature, the Department will maintain anonymous portfolios consisting of copies of final examinations and term papers written in Slavic 321 and Slavic 322 (seventh- and eighth-semester Russian.)

The Feedback Mechanism

Every summer the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will review all of the data collected in the manners described in points 1-4 above and make recommendations to the Department accordingly. The Department will discuss the recommendations at one of the first two faculty meetings of each academic year and on the basis of this discussion the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will provide the Department and the College with an annual report including:

- a. Annual summaries of the knowledge goals the Department expects its undergraduate majors and graduate students to achieve. We expect that these summaries will be sharpened during the initial years of assessment and then will be relatively unchanged from year to year unless major developments in research indicate the need for revision of the curriculum.
- b. The ways in which Russian language instruction is successful in achieving the educational goals set out by the Department, paying attention to the different objectives of students enrolled in our Department's courses (undergraduate majors, undergraduates majoring in International Relations with a concentration in Russian and East European Studies, undergraduates fulfilling foreign language requirements, and graduate students).
- c. Suggestions for changes in curriculum or pedagogy if the assessment measures indicate that problems exist or changes are needed.
- d. Suggestions for changes in the measures or methods of assessment if the Committee feels that current practice does not adequately capture the needed information.

Data collected in the assessment process and conclusions drawn during annual discussions of the data collected will be compiled by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee for the Department and the College of Letters and Sciences on an annual basis and will be included in the periodic ten-year reviews of the Department conducted by the College.

Timetable for Implementation

During the Spring 1997 semester, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will initiate the assessment of Russian language instruction as noted in points 1-4 above and will collect information (permanent addresses) necessary for the subsequent survey of students graduating with a B.A. in Russian in Spring 1997. Slavic Department faculty members who teach languages other than Russian will be asked to consider whether their language instruction can be adequately assessed in the means described in this plan; those faculty members who believe that this assessment plan will be a productive tool to measure the outcomes of their language programs will be asked to collect data in Spring 1997 as well. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will review data assessing Russian language instruction during Summer 1997 and report to the Department in Fall 1997. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will also articulate the educational goals for instruction in literature (and culture) in the target-language and in English in order to plan for the assessment of these aspects of Slavic Department programming.

Bibliography

- Carroll, John B. "Foreign Language Proficiency Levels Attained by Language Majors Near Graduation from College." *Foreign Language Annals* 1 (1967): 131-151.
- Thompson, Irene. "Assessing Foreign Language Skills: Data from Russian." *Modern Language Journal* 80 (1996): 47-65.

APPENDIX TO ASSESSMENT PLAN

Questionnaire 1: Survey of Students in Slavic 322

Reflections on your experience as a Russian major at UW-Madison

As part of the development of a process of assessing the effectiveness of the Russian major, we are asking graduating seniors to reflect on their experience in the major. These questions are intended to help us understand the major and are not specifically directed at this course alone.

1. How confident do you feel about your ability to communicate with Russians in Russian in speech and in writing?
2. How confident do you feel about your ability to understand spoken Russian?
3. How confident do you feel about your ability to understand written Russian?
4. Has your study of Russian significantly affected your appreciation for the diversity of world cultures? If so, how?
5. Has your study of Russian had an impact on your understanding of the structure of English or on your listening or reading skills in your native language?
6. What are your goals beyond the B.A.? How do you expect to find your Russian major has helped you achieve your goals after you graduate?

Questionnaire 2: Survey of Students 3 Years after the B.A.

Reflections on your experience as a Russian major at UW-Madison

As part of the development of a process of assessing the effectiveness of the Russian major, we are alumnae to reflect on their experience in the major. These questions are intended to help us understand the major as a whole.

1. Have you continued to use the language skills you acquired at UW-Madison? How?
2. How confident do you feel about your ability to communicate with Russians in Russian in speech and in writing now?
3. How confident do you feel about your ability to understand spoken Russian now?
4. How confident do you feel about your ability to understand written Russian now?
5. Did your study of Russian significantly affect your appreciation for the diversity of world cultures? If so, how?
6. Did your study of Russian at UW-Madison have a significant impact on your speaking, reading, listening, and/or writing skills in English or any other language?
7. Did your study of Russian at UW-Madison have a significant impact on your life after you graduated? If so, in what way or ways?