

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Department of Slavic Languages and Literature

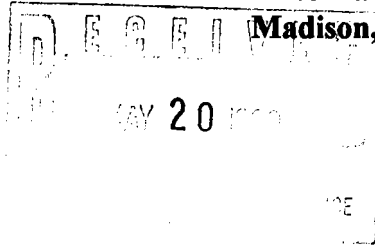
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May 19, 1999



TO: Herbert Wang, Associate Dean
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FROM: Judith Kornblatt, Chair *JK*

RE: Assessment report

Attached please find the assessment report for 1998-99 for the Undergraduate Major in Russian Language and Literature. In addition, we are maintaining a file in the office of sample papers and exams from the final course in our major sequence, Slavic 322. We will be sending an assessment report for the graduate program as soon as it is compiled.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

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<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/slavic/newsite/index.html>

Assessment of Undergraduate Major in Russian Language and Literature

**Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
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Prepared and Submitted by

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May 6, 1999

Abstract: In accordance with the plan for the assessment of the undergraduate major in Russian language and literature submitted to and approved by the College of Letters and Sciences of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the language program coordinator collected data on a number of different instruments in order to assess learner outcomes in the Russian-language program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The assessment of language performance by students at the second-, fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-semester levels in a variety of ways (lexicon, grammar, speech, writing, self-report in surveys) indicates that the Slavic Department's Russian language program is functioning very well, providing students with the opportunity to excel in Russian language studies. Independent verification of our success comes from the comparative performance of our students against the performance of students from other post-secondary institutions in the selection process for the study abroad program sponsored by the American Council of Teachers of Russian and, more importantly, by the success of our students in the National Security Education Program Scholarship competition.

I. Communicative Competence: Oral Proficiency Interviews

The language program coordinator is certified by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to conduct oral proficiency interviews, a standardized means of assessing an individual's command of a spoken language recognized throughout North America as a valid assessment instrument. The language program coordinator conducted oral proficiency interviews with students currently taking first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year Russian (Slavic 102 – 2nd Semester Russian, Slavic 204 – 4th Semester Russian, Slavic 276 – 6th Semester Russian, and Slavic 322 – 8th Semester Russian, respectively). These interviews were not double rated by a second certified interviewer and are thus not official ACTFL oral proficiency interviews, but may, nonetheless, be used as an indicator of the level of oral proficiency attained by students in Russian-language courses at these levels. Students with whom the language program coordinator conducted these interviews volunteered; the only incentive they were provided was the possibility of practice using their Russian.

Table 1 Results of Oral Proficiency Interviews

	2 nd Semester	4 th Semester	6 th Semester	8 th Semester
Student One	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid
Student Two	Novice High	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid

Comments:

The results of the oral proficiency interviews are consistent with results of last year's assessment and with published research on oral proficiency attained by students in various stages of language instruction in foreign languages in general (for instance, Carroll, 1967 and Magnan, 1986) and in Russian (Thompson, 1996). Most studies show that students completing only two years of Russian-language study achieve only intermediate-low or novice-high level oral proficiency in Russian.

Some students attained the intermediate mid level as early as the fourth-semester of instruction and this, in and of itself, is indication of the success of the lower division language program, since a more typical outcome at this level would be intermediate low oral proficiency. While students at the sixth- and eighth-semester levels demonstrated speaking skills at the same proficiency level (intermediate mid), their speech nonetheless featured more frequent control of advanced level functions, even if such control was not consistent enough to warrant a rating of intermediate high (equivalent to nearly consistent performance at the advanced level.) The students in the eighth-semester demonstrated different profiles in that one student's speech was highly accurate, but somewhat halting, and the other student's speech was much more fluent, but lacked her classmate's accuracy. These profiles are typical outcomes for students who have not participated in study abroad programs in Russia for a semester or longer; neither of the fourth-year students in the assessment sample had participated in the semester- or year-long study abroad program. Some of our best third-year students, including the two who participated in this year's assessment sample, will be abroad all year for their fourth-year of instruction. It is this writer's assumption that these students will likely cross the threshold into advanced level speech during their year-long stay in Russia; unfortunately, they will not return to Madison to participate in next year's language program assessment.

While the Slavic Department would like to see higher levels of oral proficiency attained by undergraduates studying Russian who complete the entire four year sequence, it is unlikely that higher levels of oral proficiency can be attained by students who take the regular sequence of courses in Russian without studying abroad, as suggested by Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg (1993). The Slavic Department encourages all students to participate in study abroad programs, especially during the junior year; the University of Wisconsin-Madison has entered an agreement with the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) regarding study abroad programs sponsored by ACTR in Moscow and

St. Petersburg that would be available for UW-Madison students for residency credit. For more information about the study abroad programs, see the web page of ACTR at www.actr.org or the web page of the UW-Madison Office of International Studies and Programs (OISP) at www.wisc.edu/studyabroad.

II. Grammatical Competence

As part of the undergraduate language assessment for Russian, the language program coordinator worked with instructors in second-, third- and fourth-year Russian (Slavic 204, Slavic 276, and Slavic 322) to administer a test of Russian grammar to all students in all sections of these three courses. These tests were administered in mid-April 1999; the same test was used in each class. This test consists of an extended cloze text in Russian, adapted from a book on a Russian filmmaker, with English cues for 100 blanks. Students are instructed to fill in each blank based on the context and the English cue provided. Each student's test was scored as the sum of correct responses (out of a possible 100 correct responses.) The language program coordinator uses this test as a placement tool for undergraduates with previous Russian-language instruction at another institution. For these purposes, a score of 10 or higher results in placement in the first semester of second-year (Slavic 203), 20 or higher – placement in the first semester of third-year (Slavic 275), and 30 or higher – placement in the first semester of fourth-year (Slavic 321). This same test is used to assess the grammatical competency of graduate students in Russian literature; graduate students must attain a score of 90 or higher in order to pass their grammar exam for the Ph.D.

Table 2 Results of Grammar Tests

	2 nd -Year Section 1	2 nd -Year Section 2	3 rd -Year	4 th -Year
Mean Score '98	25.6	27.73	43.71	52.67
Mean Score '99	27.83	25.5	34.27	35.13

The results indicate that while the students' mastery of Russian grammar improves with each year of instruction, scores in 3rd and 4th year are lower in Spring '99 than they were in '98. However, the highest scores in each of the levels in Spring '99 were higher than corresponding scores in Spring '98, suggesting that individual students performed better in 1999 than in 1998, while the classes, taken as wholes, did not perform as well in 1999 as in 1998. Even so, scores for each different year of instruction are in accordance with the established expectations for placement when this instrument is used for that purpose with the exception of the fourth-year score. We will need to accumulate more data – conducting the assessment programs in years to come – to determine how the scores from these two years fit into a larger trend.

III. Lexical Competence

In addition to the tests described above, the language program administered a vocabulary test to measure the lexical competence of students in the first three years of Russian language instruction. The vocabulary test was created on the basis of Patrick Waddington's *A Russian Vocabulary* (Bristol Books), which includes a list of 850 of the most commonly used words in Russian. Every tenth word from this list was selected for the vocabulary test; students were asked to provide the English equivalent of the given 85 Russian words. The purpose of this test is to measure the degree to which students will be able to read for meaning in Russian without having to resort frequently to a dictionary. Mean scores reported in the table below reflect a maximum possible score of 84 (equivalent to 100% correct) due to the exclusion of one item with a typographical error rendering it ambiguous.

Table 3 Results of Vocabulary Test

	1 st -Year Russian Section 1	1 st -Year Russian Section 2	2 nd -Year Russian Section 1	2 nd -Year Russian Section 2	3 rd -Year Russian	4 th -Year Russian
Mean	45.06	48.7	50.33	56.46	69.90	xxxxx
Mean	45.00	46.53	57.00	59.11	71.55	75.22

Beginning in the fall of 1998, students in first- through third-year Russian began working with Waddington dictionary and it was explained to all students in the program that the 850-word vocabulary in that dictionary is the assumed vocabulary for all Russian-language reading texts assigned in Slavic 204-Slavic 322. Means on the vocabulary assessment in first- and third-year were nearly identical this year to the means last year. Means in second year were significantly better than those for second year in last year's assessment program, perhaps due to the adoption of a new textbook at that level in our program beginning this academic year. Vocabulary data were not collected for fourth-year last year, so no comparison can be made yet for that course.

IV. Portfolio of Samples of Work for Fourth-Year Russian

The Slavic Department has collected a portfolio of samples of work done by students in fourth-year Russian (Slavic 322) in the Spring 1999 semester, adding to the portfolio collected in Spring 1998. This portfolio includes short papers in Russian as well as longer papers on literary analysis in English with citations in Russian. The papers collected both years include strong and weak work, indicating that some of our students are able to write quite well and with great creativity in Russian (probably at the intermediate high or advanced level according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines for writing), but that not all our students achieve such writing proficiency.

V. Survey of Graduating Seniors

As part of the Slavic Department's assessment of the undergraduate Russian major, students completing the major in Spring 1999 who are enrolled in Slavic 322 were asked to complete a survey focusing on their experiences as Russian majors. The survey instrument used in Spring 1999 was revised from the previous year in order to include questions about literature and culture courses in our program. The discussion of those questions will be presented in the document addressing the assessment of literature and culture instruction. The questions concerning language study were mostly retained from last year's survey; information in brackets below indicates the number of the question in last year's survey and a summary of responses to this question in last year's survey. The total number of respondents to this year's survey is 7.

Question 1 [Question 1 in 1998]: How confident do you feel about your ability to communicate with Russians in Russian in speech and writing?

Responses to Question 1: Students reported they feel comfortable with conversation, but less comfortable with more formal spoken communication in Russian. Most, but not all, students reported they feel less comfortable with writing than with speech. One student wrote, "I feel confident that Russians can understand what I say and write and that I can understand them." [Responses in 1998: Most students reported they were confident of their ability to communicate well in Russian in writing, less confident of their ability to communicate well in Russian in speech.]

Question 2 [Question 2 in 1998]: How confident do you feel about your ability to understand spoken Russian?

Responses to Question 2: While some students reported being able to understand more than they themselves can say, others expressed confidence that they can understand spoken Russian quite well: "I feel very confident I think that I have made a lot of progress [in this area]." Some students expressed concern with the rate of speech, noting that they could understand spoken Russian well only when native speakers slowed down for them. [Responses in 1998: Students reported feeling less confident of their listening comprehension than of their reading comprehension, especially with regard to speakers with whom they are unfamiliar.]

Question 3 [Question 3 in 1998]: How confident do you feel about your ability to understand written Russian?

Responses to Question 3: Students report great satisfaction with their reading skills in Russian. One student wrote, "I feel that I can understand most of what I read." Another wrote, "I'm amazed at what we can read and understand [in Russian]." [Responses in 1998: Students reported great confidence in their ability to read in Russian.]

Question 4 [Question 5 in 1998]: Has your study of Russian has an impact on your understanding of the structure of English or on your listening or reading skills in your native language?

Responses to Question 4: Students consistently reported that they appreciate English and its structure much better having studied Russian, while only some reported improvements in listening or reading skills in English because they have studied Russian. [Responses in 1998: Most students reported that the study of Russian has not had an impact on their understanding of English or on their listening or reading skills in their native language, but some students reported that they “have been paying more attention to the way in which language ‘works’ since ...” they began the study of Russian or that they have become more sensitive to English grammar now than when they took English classes.]

Question 9 [Question 4 in 1998]: Has your study of Russian significantly affected your appreciation for the diversity of world cultures? If so, how?

Responses to Question 9: Students responded consistently that they have a greater sense of the diversity of world cultures in large part due to their studies of Russian language and culture as part of their Russian BA requirements at UW-Madison. [Response in 1998: Students reported that the study of Russian has not affected their appreciation for the diversity of world cultures because they report having appreciated world cultures before starting to study Russian.]

Question 10 [Question 6 in 1998]: What are your goals beyond the BA? How do you expect to find your Russian major has helped you achieve your goals after you graduate?

Responses to Question 10: Some students reported they were planning on pursuing graduate study, work for non-profit organizations, government work, and teacher certification (in English), while others reported they were not certain what they would be doing after graduation. [Response in 1998: Students reported that they hope to find work with the federal government, go to graduate school and that they believe that the study of Russian will prepare them for career and study options in the future.]

VI. Plans for Subsequent Assessment

The Slavic Department has collected graduating seniors’ permanent addresses in order to conduct a survey of graduates’ opinions of their Russian-language education three years after graduation (i.e., in 2002 for those students graduating in 1999.) Starting in the Spring 2000 semester we will begin to implement an annual assessment of reading skills in order to document progress in this area. In the Spring 2001 semester we will begin to implement an annual assessment of listening skills and begun rotating the assessment instruments so that the students and instructors in our program are not too burdened with departmental tests in the month of April.

VII. Ongoing Curricular Improvements

Last year the Slavic Department decided to adopt new textbooks for first- and second-year Russian. These textbooks were adopted and the new curriculum was implemented as of Fall 1998:

First Year

Russian Stage One: Live from Moscow (textbook with video program and CD-ROM), Davidson, Gor and Lekic (1996)

START: An Introduction to the Sound and Writing Systems of Russian (CD-ROM), Rifkin (1998)

Second Year

Russian Stage Two (textbook with video program), Martin and Sokolova (1992)

The new 2-year curriculum is designed to provide a more coherent program. In addition to these works, students in first- and second-year Russian will continue to use Gerhart's *The Russian's World: Life and Language* (1995) as a reference for Russian culture and life. The third-year course will continue to use Rifkin's *Grammatika v kontekste: Russian Grammar in Literary Contexts*, a textbook-developed by Benjamin Rifkin specifically for UW-Madison's third-year program. This textbook was published by McGraw-Hill in 1996 and is currently in use in over 50 colleges and universities throughout North America. Students in the third-year course also read a variety of literary and non-literary texts. Students in the fourth-year course read a variety of literary and non-literary texts.

We are satisfied that the current curriculum works well. Indeed, a review of all applicants to the study abroad program sponsored by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) for the Fall 1999 Semester Program and the 1999-2000 Academic Year Program revealed that applicants from the University of Wisconsin-Madison were among the best prepared candidates for admission to the programs and for selection for the honors classes of their respective programs. The top-ranked candidate, of over 50 applicants, for all the ACTR programs was a UW-Madison student. The ACTR programs attract applicants from top-ranked colleges and universities across North America; the excellent showing of UW-Madison's students in that competition is indicative of the quality of the Russian-language instruction our department provides. Moreover, three UW-Madison students of Russian were selected as primary candidates for the National Security Education Program (NSEP) scholarship (to support study abroad in Russia); in the past, all primary candidates have been funded. This scholarship is extremely competitive: the fact that 3 of our students were selected stands as incontrovertible evidence of the success of our language training in comparison with programs across the nation.

VIII. Plans for Future Curricular Improvements

The results of our on-going assessment program are evidence that our language program is working well. While not all of our students achieve great success in their Russian-language study, many students do achieve great success when their skills are measured against the ACTFL proficiency guidelines or when their performance is compared to those of students at other institutions applying to the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) for study abroad. Given published research data on feasible learning outcomes in a four-year language curriculum (e.g., Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg, 1993; Thompson, 1996), our successful learners' Russian-language skills, upon graduation, are in the highest performance ranges. We are proud of this achievement and look forward to continuing to lead students toward this success. In our efforts to expand the range of students who achieve this success, we are looking toward incorporating more computer-mediated exercises, such as web-based activities and CD-ROM based exercises, since some of our students respond very well to work in these new media. We will continue to monitor the success of our new second-year textbook, as some students and instructors have expressed dissatisfaction with the book. It is possible that in a year or two we will consider adopting a different textbook for this level. The textbooks in first- and third-year are working quite well and we will continue to use them. Clearly, however, the best indicator of language gain is participation in a study abroad program and we will continue to recommend study abroad with great enthusiasm to all our students. The study abroad programs in Moscow and St. Petersburg run by our organizational partner, ACTR, are excellent programs offering both language and area studies courses at a reasonable price, with home stay residential options. We will continue to bring information about the ACTR programs to our undergraduate language classes as early as first-semester to encourage students to think about study abroad and to plan for it. It is, in fact, the single best predictor of language study success for our students.

Works Cited

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