

Spring 2004 Assessment of Undergraduate Major in Russian

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Prepared and Submitted by

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Note: Professor Ben Rifkin, who usually submits this report in his capacity as Russian language coordinator and pedagogy specialist, is on sabbatical leave this semester. Any deficiencies in this year's report are the fault of Prof. Danaher, whose qualifications in the area of language pedagogy and whose familiarity with all the details of the Russian program and the Russian majors themselves are not as developed as his colleague's!

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. Two years ago we began to alternate the assessments of listening and reading; in spring 2003, we assessed reading skills; this year we assessed listening skills (and will revisit reading in spring 2005). We will continue alternating the tests in order to reduce the assessment burden on teachers and students. Language assessments, enrollment patterns, national prizes and surveys indicate that the Slavic Department's Russian language program is functioning well, providing students with the opportunity to excel in Russian language studies.

I. Enrollment Patterns / Number of Majors

Two years ago we introduced a new section to our assessment report, focusing on enrollment patterns and the number of majors (see table below).

Russian Majors

	Total Russian Majors	Russian Lang & Lit Majors	Russian Lang & Civ Majors	Russian Native Speaker Majors
May 2002	46	17	25	4
Graduating May and Dec 2002	8	6	0	2
May 2003	61	21	34	6
Graduating May and Dec 2003	16	4	11	1
May 2004	54	19	30	5
Graduating May and Dec 2004	13	5	7	1

As this report goes to press (May 4), enrollments in Russian-language classes for the fall 2004 semester are strong:

Course	Semester	Enrollment	Retention Rate
Slavic 102	Spring 2004	67	
Slavic 203	Fall 2004	53*	79%
Slavic 204	Spring 2004	32	
Slavic 275	Fall 2004	16*	50%
Slavic 276	Spring 2004	11	
Slavic 321	Fall 2004	14*	100+%

*Students in each noted cohort are planning on participating in study abroad on the UW-Madison ACTR exchange or taking summer study in Russian. We are not certain of their placement upon return. Numbers for Slavic 321 for Fall 2004 reflect enrollment after summer study from students currently in 2nd year Russian.

In addition to the numbers above, we are pleased to report that there are 52 students enrolled in first-semester Russian (Slavic 101) for the fall 2004 semester as of this writing. This is slightly, but not drastically, lower than the number of students who enrolled by this time in the spring 2003 registration period. The enrollments reported here do not yet reflect SOAR enrollments.

II. 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. A graduate student who is

an ACTFL-certified OPI tester 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 graduate assistant conducted these interviews volunteered; the only incentive they were provided was the possibility of practice using their Russian.

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 High
Student Two	Novice High	Novice High	Intermediate High	Advanced Low

Students selected for interviews represent the best learning outcomes in our program. While there is some variation from year to year in the results of these interviews, this year's results for all levels are typical of what we have seen in the past.

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.

Studies show that students who complete only two years of foreign language study at the college level typically achieve only intermediate low oral proficiency and this is consistent with our findings.

It is important to remember when interpreting these results that the difficulty of moving from novice level proficiency to intermediate level proficiency is not comparable with the difficulty of moving from intermediate level proficiency to advanced level proficiency, and so forth. The "distance" between each major level on the proficiency scale (novice, intermediate, advanced, superior) is not equal; the effort and time required to move from one major level to the next increases geometrically at each higher level. In other words, the scale is *not* linear, but rather *geometric* in nature.

III. Grammatical Competence

As part of the undergraduate language assessment for Russian, the project assistant for 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 computer-mediated tests were administered in mid-April 2004; the same test was used in each class. This test consists of an extended cloze text in Russian, adapted from a contemporary Russian murder mystery novel, 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 the Middlebury Russian School (a summer program). 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.

The mean scores for Spring 2004 (as compared to scores in previous years as presented in the chart below) are:

Results of Grammar Tests

	2 nd -Year Section 1	2 nd -Year Section 2	3 rd -Year	4 th -Year
Mean Score '04	21.6		25.7	40.9
Mean Score '03	29.5		N/a	44.5
Mean Score '02	25		37.3	47.54
Mean Score '01	20		40.5	49.25
Mean Score '00	22.58	20.5	38.75	30.17
Mean Score '99	27.83	25.5	34.27	35.13
Mean Score '98	25.6	27.73	43.71	52.67

(Unfortunately, due to a computer failure, we were unable to capture the scores for third-year Russian in the spring 2003 assessment process.)

We continue to assess scores in 2nd year only on a course-wide basis, rather than per sections. This year saw a decrease in the scores of students in the second year, a slight decline in the scores of fourth-year students, and a rather steep decline in the mean score of students in third-year. The score in the second-year course is lower than in 2003 or 2002, but higher than in 2001; it is possibly affected by the test date being moved up this

year because of scheduling problems: in second-year, a week or two of instruction can make a significance difference in grammar development. The fourth-year students' scores remain higher than they were since 2000, but still have not reached the peak they set in 1998. A possible reason for the significant decline in the third-year mean score is the replacement of the grammar textbook normally used for that class; we will be returning to our previous book for the 2004-05 academic year.

IV. 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 for Spring '04 are the following:

1st Year:	38
2nd Year:	53.5
3rd Year:	74.3
4th Year:	79.7

Mean scores reported in the table below for the past several years indicate a comparable level of achievement for this year's students.

Lexical Competence Results 2002 – Present

	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year	4 th Year
Spring '04	38	53.5	74.3	79.7
Fall '03	N/a	35.2	54.8	61.5
Spring '03	43.1	55.1	77.15	74.8
Fall '02	N/a	31.0	58.7	71.1
Spring '02	42.4	59.41	71.65	77.88

IV. Listening and Reading Skills

In the spring 2002 assessment we focused only on listening skills, beginning an alternation of listening and reading assessments. In the spring of 2003, we assessed reading skills. This year we alternate back to listening skills.

In 2002 we implemented a more realistic (and more accurate) listening proficiency assessment and learned that our previous years' assessments were inflated due to a

simpler (less challenging) listening test that was not sufficiently carefully correlated with the proficiency guidelines. Our results indicate that students in the second semester class typically achieve novice mid listening comprehension, but the average level of listening comprehension does not increase much from year to year, with the average listening comprehension result at the 4th year level only at intermediate low. However, the range of listening comprehension results at each level is indicative of growth, since the high scores at each level of instruction are successively higher:

Course	Listening Mean / Rating 2002	Listening Mean / Rating 2001	Listening High Score 2002
Slavic 102	0.52 / NM	0.9/NH	1.0
Slavic 204	0.77 / NM - NH	1.0/IL	1.0*
Slavic 276	0.85 / NM - NH	N/A	1.5
Slavic 322	1.0 / IL	1.9/IH	1.5

*excluding higher scores earned by native speakers of Russian in this class.

In this year's listening assessment, we decided not to rate students in Slavic 102 because the results at this early stage are highly predictable and therefore not significant for our assessment purposes. Results for the other levels are as follows:

<u>Course</u>	<u>Listening Mean/ Rating 2004</u>	<u>Listening High Score 2004</u>
Slavic 204	.915 / NH	1.5
Slavic 276	.986 / IL	1
Slavic 322	1.53 / IM	1.9

This year's mean results show a marked improvement over the results achieved in 2002. The high score for one student in 204 is clearly anomalous; when his result is eliminated, the mean score for 204 is .884, which is still higher than the 2002 mean.

V. 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 2004 semester, adding to the portfolio collected in 1998-2003. This portfolio includes short papers 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.

VI. Survey of Graduating Seniors

As part of the Slavic Department's assessment of the undergraduate Russian major, students completing the major in Spring 2004 who are enrolled in Slavic 322 were asked to complete a survey focusing on their experiences as Russian majors. Unfortunately, because of certain complications beyond the control of the faculty member in charge of preparing this report, only one survey was returned to our departmental administrator. This student indicated complete satisfaction with the first two years of instruction but much less satisfaction with the fourth-year course (the student spent all of his third year abroad in Russia).

This student's response confirms that we need to increase the time in our fourth-year curriculum (Slavic 321-322) devoted to the study of non-literary texts, as our students majoring in Russian language and civilization do not feel satisfied with the readings in fourth-year Russian. Plans are in place to make this change with the introduction into the fourth-year sequence of a textbook in advanced reading that will feature non-literary texts.

VII. Ongoing Curricular Improvements

The textbook used in first-year Russian, *Russian Stage One: Live from Moscow*, continues to enjoy popularity among the students and instructors of that course. The textbook used in 2nd year Russian this year, *Russian Stage Two: Welcome Back!*, was found to be very good. We have supplemented it this year with additional materials – including reading material – now that we know the textbook better, having used it for a year. We have agreed to use Terence Wade's *Comprehensive Russian Grammar and Workbook* as supplementary grammar texts for the fourth-year Russian course and this was our first year using that book in the 4th year course. The most significant change this year was switching to an older grammar textbook for the Third-Year sequence; we will be moving back to *Grammatika v kontekste* for the upcoming year.

First Year

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

Russian's World, Gerhart (2001)

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

Second Year

Russian Stage Two: Welcome Back! (textbook with video program), Martin and Zaitsev
(2000)

Russian's World, Gerhart (2001)

Third Year

Making Progress in Russian, Davis/Oprendek, and readings selected by the instructor

Fourth Year

A Comprehensive Russian Grammar and Workbook, Wade (2000), and readings selected by the instructor

VIII. Student Awards

Our students continue to win competitive awards based on their Russian skills. This year, two of our Russian majors have won NSEP (National Security Education Program) Fellowships to study abroad for a year in Russia, and one was selected as an alternate fellow. Our program has a proven record of NSEP Fellows, as well as other grant winners at the undergraduate level, and this testifies to the program's continued vitality.

REPORT SUMMARY

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 a high performance range. We are proud of this achievement and look forward to continuing to lead students toward this success. The continuing development of listening comprehension activities for Russian in the context of the T⁴ Foreign Languages Project will help us improve instruction in listening comprehension in the future. In the very near future, a service learning course (at the third-year level) will be implemented in which students could work with Russian-speaking émigrés living in the Madison area. This course would fulfill requirements for both the Language and Literature major and the Language and Civilization major.

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