

# **Institutional Effectiveness Report**

**Name of Program/Department:** Modern Languages Program

**Year:** 2015-2016

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## **Program Mission Statement**

The Department of English, Modern Languages, and Philosophy offers a major, minor and collateral in Modern Languages with tracks in French, German, and Spanish. Our mission is to provide the resources for students to acquire advanced oral proficiency, writing proficiency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension in French, German, and Spanish, while gaining knowledge of the history, art, values, and customs of the cultures where these languages are spoken. Career opportunities for foreign language majors include teaching, international business, translation, interpretation, government professions, the military, and health care. Modern Languages majors often seek graduate degrees in foreign languages.

## **Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

Successful graduates of Modern Languages B.A. programs at Francis Marion University will demonstrate advanced oral proficiency, writing proficiency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension in the target language and recognize the cultural context in which oral and written discourses are produced.

## **Executive Summary of Report**

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the Modern Languages program assessed five Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The SLOs covered areas such as speaking, writing, reading, listening, and cultural awareness. The Program employed departmental rubrics and testing forms to evaluate the SLOs. Students performed on average at the 83% level in the SLOs of speaking and writing when classifying salient aspects of current trends and issues in Modern Languages. Our target was 75%, therefore, we achieved our target on SLO 1.0 and 2.0. Next, students performed, on average, at the 93% level in reading. Our target was again 75%; therefore, we achieved our target on SLO 3.0. With regards to listening, students performed, on average, 98%, while our target was 75%. Therefore, our target was achieved on SLO 4.0. Finally, with regards to cultural awareness, even though students performed, on average, at 83%, with our target being 75%; it must be noted that this is a drop from last year. This is SLO 5.0.

Based on these findings, the Modern Languages Program notes that we need to improve Cultural Awareness. It recognizes the need for more study abroad programs and the need to make more cultural content available through multimedia. Students struggle the most when attempting to describe and identify key issues germane to the Modern Language Program's targets in writing and speaking SLOs. To address these issues, we plan on targeting the specific issues in our classes with more writing assignments, more attention to the writing and revision processes, and more targeted speaking practice in the classroom when study abroad is not available. We will continue to encourage speaking practice outside of the classroom through conversation tables and participation in our study abroad programs.

## **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

Upon successful completion of a major, students should demonstrate the following learning outcomes, developed by Modern Languages faculty at Francis Marion University, based largely on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines, developed from the Federal Government's IRL scale.

SLO 1.0: Students will be able to engage in conversation and create within the target language when talking about familiar topics, producing complete sentences using a variety of linguistic structures to convey intended messages. This will occur without misrepresentation or confusion at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below.

SLO 2.0: Students will be able to fulfill practical writing needs in the target language, such as producing simple messages, letters, requests for information, notes, and essays with very few or that interfere with comprehension at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below.

SLO 3.0: Students will be able to understand the main ideas and supporting details of a variety of written texts and can deduce meaning of unknown vocabulary through context clues.

Misunderstandings may occur when exposed to texts containing highly specialized vocabulary or relating to unusual or abstract situations, but there will be a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below.

SLO 4.0: Students will understand spoken discourses on a variety of topics in the target language, from among a range of different dialects and in different registers such as formal, informal, literary, colloquial, conversational, etc. at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below.

SLO 5.0: Students will be able to demonstrate an awareness of the ways in which language and culture intersect, as well as openness to the history, art, customs, values, and daily life of the peoples living in the cultures where the target languages are spoken, at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below.

## **Assessment Methods**

SLO 1.0: Students will be able to engage in conversation and create within the target language when talking about familiar topics, producing complete sentences using a variety of linguistic structures to convey intended messages. This will occur without misrepresentation or confusion at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below. Assessment methods include an evaluation by Modern Languages faculty of recorded oral interviews from the French, German, and Spanish Conversation courses using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines.

SLO 2.0: Students will be able to fulfill practical writing needs in the target language, such as producing simple messages, letters, requests for information, notes, and essays with very few or that interfere with comprehension at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below. Assessment methods include an evaluation by Modern Languages Faculty of essays written in one or more of the student's Modern Languages courses using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines.

SLO 3.0: Students will be able to understand the main ideas and supporting details of a variety of written texts and can deduce meaning of unknown vocabulary through context clues.

Misunderstandings may occur when exposed to texts containing highly specialized vocabulary or

relating to unusual or abstract situations, but there will be a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below. Assessment methods include the evaluation by Modern Languages faculty of written exams and essays in the student's Modern Languages courses using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines.

SLO 4.0: Students will understand spoken discourses on a variety of topics in the target language, from among a range of different dialects and in different registers such as formal, informal, literary, colloquial, conversational, etc. at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below. Assessment methods include an evaluation by Modern Language faculty of written exams and essays in the student's Modern Languages courses using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines.

SLO 5.0: Students will be able to demonstrate an awareness of the ways in which language and culture intersect, as well as openness to the history, art, customs, values, and daily life of the peoples living in the cultures where the target languages are spoken, at a 75% level of proficiency based on program benchmarks listed below. Assessment includes an evaluation by Modern Languages faculty of written exams and essays in the student's Modern Languages courses using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines. Written cultural statements composed by students who have participated in study abroad programs are also evaluated using a rubric based on ACTFL guidelines.

### **Benchmarks for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes**

Student work was evaluated in accordance with the following Assessment Scale based on ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Four (4) through one (1), with four being the highest and one the lowest assessment level given. **The Modern Languages faculty have established a benchmark of 2.5 (Intermediate High Proficiency) as a desirable overall average for learning outcomes at the undergraduate level.** Exit Interviews were also collected from graduating French and Spanish majors. Where applicable, the results from these procedures have also been used to evaluate success in achieving program goals.

### **Conversational Proficiency / Conversational Skills**

Level Four: Speaks and comprehends in a variety of registers with sufficient skills to move the conversation forward. Has only a few moments of hesitation and demonstrates a proficient and varied vocabulary for effective communication. Grammar has only a few serious faults and pronunciation is comprehensible. Ability to contribute own ideas to conversation in addition to answering questions or responding to situations.

Level Three: Speaks and comprehends in various registers demonstrating the ability to grasp most of the topic with little or no repetition. Carries conversation with sufficient skills for communication. Grammar errors and mispronunciations do not impede intended statements or explanations. Answers questions with reasonable information.

Level Two: Speaks and comprehends with some hesitation. Communicates facts and ideas using basic vocabulary and structures. Errors occur frequently and in patterns but speech is generally comprehensible to those accustomed to conversing with non-natives.

Level One: Able only to utter polite phrases. Unable to comprehend or respond well even when questions or situations are repeated numerous times. Has very little concept of grammar nor

possesses adequate vocabulary to converse on topics presented. Pronunciation hinders communication.

### **Writing Proficiency / Writing Skills**

Level Four: Able to produce formal and informal writing, including summaries, reports, and correspondence on a variety of topics. Conveys meaning and explains complex ideas in a clear, precise manner. Writes in paragraph form with a high degree of control of grammar and syntax. Very few or no errors occur and do not interfere with comprehension.

Level Three: Able to write factual descriptions and summaries and to narrate clearly in the past, present and future. Shows good control of frequently used structures and vocabulary and produces routine informal and some formal writing in paragraph form. Errors occur but writing can be generally understood by those not accustomed to writing by non-natives.

Level Two: Writes messages, letters, and notes on general topics related to practical needs. Communicates facts and ideas using basic vocabulary and structures. Texts are generally comprehensible to those accustomed to writing of non-natives despite more frequent errors.

Level One: Able to produce only lists and notes containing high-frequency vocabulary words and formulaic phrases. Relies heavily on practiced material and common elements of daily life. Unable to sustain sentence-level writing all the time. Errors are frequent and gaps in comprehension are likely to occur.

### **Reading Proficiency / Reading Skills**

Level Four: Comprehends a wide variety of written texts from different genres including those with complex structures and cultural references. Able to follow extended discourse on unfamiliar topics and to make inferences based on what is read. Misunderstandings may occur when exposed to texts containing highly specialized vocabulary or relating to unusual or abstract situations.

Level Three: Understands the main ideas and some supporting details of narrative and descriptive texts related to general interest topics. Able to process information organized in a clear and predictable way and to compensate for limitations by using real-world knowledge or context cues. Comprehension may become problematic when dealing with abstract ideas or unfamiliar topics.

Level Two: Understands information in everyday texts that convey basic information and deal with common, personal, and social topics. Comprehension is most often accurate when texts include familiar vocabulary and basic grammatical structures. Comprehension is often uneven and misunderstandings may occur, especially with longer texts containing low-frequency vocabulary or unfamiliar structures.

Level One: Comprehends only a very limited amount of information in common, predictable texts that include key words and highly contextualized expressions. Relies heavily on his or her own background and extra linguistic cues to derive meaning. Misunderstandings may occur frequently.

## **Listening Proficiency / Listening Skills**

Level Four: Comprehends extended discourse in a variety of registers on a wide range of topics. Understands speech that may contain complex grammatical structures, uncommon vocabulary or culture-specific references. Able to make inferences based on what is said. Misunderstandings may occur when exposed to speech containing highly specialized vocabulary or relating to unusual or abstract situations.

Level Three: Able to grasp the main ideas and some supporting details of authentic discourse related to general interest topics. Able to distinguish basic time frames and to process information organized in a clear and predictable way. Comprehension may be limited to concrete, conventional discourse; comprehension may become problematic when dealing with abstract ideas or unfamiliar topics.

Level Two: Understands information related to common, everyday topics when conveyed in simple, sentence-length speech. Comprehension is most often accurate when exposed to speech containing high frequency vocabulary, basic grammatical structures, and familiar or predictable social contexts. Comprehension is often uneven and misunderstandings may occur.

Level One: Understands only key words and expressions that are highly contextualized and predictable. Relies heavily on extra linguistic cues to derive meaning and may require frequent repetition and rephrasing. Misunderstandings may occur frequently.

## **Attitudes Regarding the Intersection of Language and Culture**

Level Four: Demonstrates a deep and robust understanding of the relationship between the practices, products, and the perspectives of the culture studied. Able to discuss many culturally-relevant themes and topics, although misunderstandings may occur, especially when exposed to highly specialized cultural references.

Level Three: Demonstrates a moderate understanding of the relationship between the practices, products, and the perspectives of the culture studied. Able to discuss many culturally-relevant themes and topics, although cultural misunderstandings may occur occasionally.

Level Two: Demonstrates a basic understanding of the relationship between the practices, products, and the perspectives of the culture studied. Able to discuss very common themes and topics that are culturally-relevant. Cultural misunderstandings may occur frequently.

Level One: Demonstrates only a minimal understanding of the relationship between the practices, products, and the perspectives of the culture studied. Cultural misunderstandings are likely to occur often.

## **Assessment Results**

SLO 1.0: Students were able to engage in conversation and create within the target language when talking about familiar topics, producing complete sentences using a variety of linguistic structures to convey intended messages without misrepresentation or confusion at an overall 83% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved.

SLO 2.0: Students were able to fulfill practical writing needs in the target language, such as producing simple messages, letters, requests for information, notes, and essays with very few or no errors that interfere with comprehension at an overall 83% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved.

SLO 3.0: Students were able to understand the main ideas and supporting details of a variety of written texts and deduced meaning of unknown vocabulary through context clues.

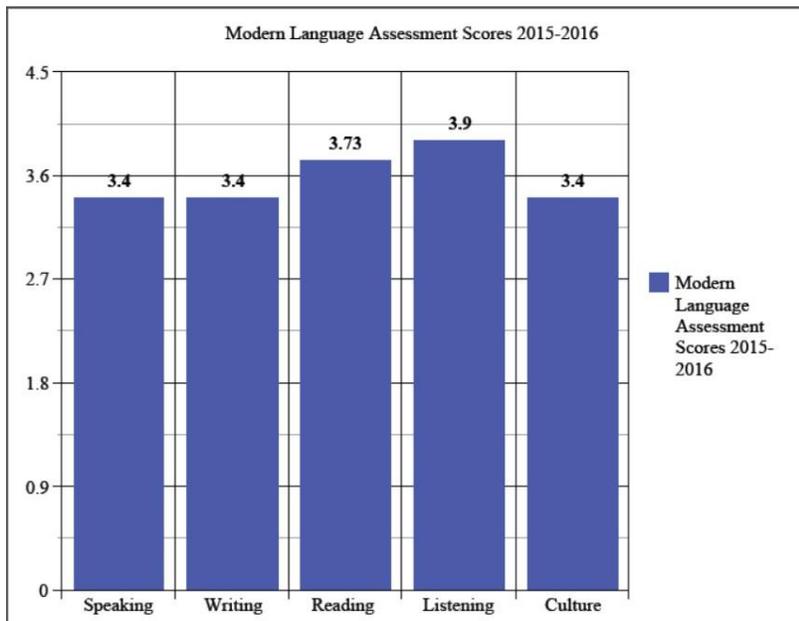
Misunderstandings may have occurred when exposed to texts containing highly specialized vocabulary or relating to unusual or abstract situations, but there was an overall 97.5% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved.

SLO 4.0: Students understood spoken discourses on a variety of topics in the target language, from among a range of different dialects and in different registers such as formal, informal, literary, colloquial, conversational, etc. at a 93.2% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved.

SLO 5.0: Students were able to demonstrate an awareness of the ways in which language and culture intersect, as well as openness to the history, art, customs, values, and daily life of the peoples living in the cultures where the target languages are spoken, at an 85% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved.

### Scoring of Student-Produced Work

Materials collected from three undergraduate Modern Languages Majors (two Spanish majors and one French major) were assessed. The results of the scoring of student-produced work show that the department's benchmarks have been met for each goal. The chart below reflects this year's composite student averages for the Modern Languages program.



As the assessment scores demonstrate, the area in need of most improvement is Culture. Compared to last year, the culture average decreased from 4 to 3.4, while the Listening average saw the largest increase from 3.55 to 3.9. The strongest area is listening, with an increase from 3.55 in 2014-15 to 3.9 in 2015-16.

## **Results of Exit Interviews**

Graduating Modern Languages majors completed exit interviews. Each student responded to a questionnaire and/or scheduled a meeting with a Modern Languages faculty member to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program. These comments were taken into consideration and analyzed to help determine program strengths and weaknesses.

The graduating French major stated that he enjoyed his major at FMU and found the instructors helpful and small class sizes beneficial, because “the learning seems more personalized.” He also stated that he that he learned a great deal about French culture from his participation in FMU’s semester abroad program in Normandy, France. Suggestions for improvement included hiring more French faculty so that FMU could offer a larger variety of lower and upper level classes. He also recommended that FMU better advertise the French major.

The Spanish majors stated that they also enjoyed having smaller class sizes due to the benefit of closer contact with professors as well as the ability to “speak more Spanish with their classmates.” One student stated that “if the curriculum incorporated more classes like the Spanish Graphic Novel class (a Special Topics class), the students would show more interest in reading, participations, and even in practicing and improving their Spanish.” In general, however, the graduating seniors were positive about their experiences, but recommend more publicity about the major, and felt especially positive about publicizing the benefits of Spanish as a second major.

## **Action Items**

**SLO 1.0:** In 2015-2016, students were able to engage in conversation and create within the target language when talking about familiar topics, producing complete sentences using a variety of linguistic structures to convey intended messages without misrepresentation or confusion at an overall 83% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved, but at a slightly lower level than reading comprehension or listening comprehension. Based on these findings, in 2016-2017 our program plans to create more opportunities for students to practice speech both within and outside of the classroom, including more communicative activities in class, additional language table meetings outside of class, and more study abroad opportunities, especially in Spanish.

**SLO 2.0:** In 2015-2016, students were able to fulfill practical writing needs in the target language, such as producing simple messages, letters, requests for information, notes, and essays with very few or no errors that interfere with comprehension at an overall 83% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved, but at a lower level than reading comprehension or listening comprehension. Based on these findings, in 2016-2017 our program plans to add more writing assignments to our courses, placing greater emphasis on the process of writing and revision, exposing students to more models of successful writing in various genres, and better utilizing existing campus resources such as the Writing Center to improve student writing outcomes.

**SLO 3.0:** In 2015-2016, students were able to understand the main ideas and supporting details of a variety of written texts and deduced meaning of unknown vocabulary through context clues. Misunderstandings may have occurred when exposed to texts containing highly specialized vocabulary or relating to unusual or abstract situations, but there was an overall 97.5% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved. Based on these findings,

in 2016-2017 our program plans to continue our highly successful approaches to teaching reading at all levels, including our Introduction to Reading courses and upper-division literature courses.

SLO 4.0: In 2015-2016 students understood spoken discourses on a variety of topics in the target language, from among a range of different dialects and in different registers such as formal, informal, literary, colloquial, conversational, etc. at a 93.2% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved. Based on these findings, in 2016-2017 our program plans to continue our highly successful approaches to teaching listening comprehension at all levels, which includes new multimedia materials in elementary and intermediate classes as well as new multimedia materials in upper-level Conversation and professional-track courses (i.e. Business French, Spanish for the Health Professions, etc.).

SLO 5.0: In 2015-2016, students were able to demonstrate an awareness of the ways in which language and culture intersect, as well as openness to the history, art, customs, values, and daily life of the peoples living in the cultures where the target languages are spoken, at an 85% level of proficiency. Since our benchmark was 75%, this Target was achieved, but at a lower level of proficiency than speaking or listening comprehension. Based on these findings, in 2016-2017 our program plans to add more study abroad opportunities and more cultural content in the classroom and in homework assignments through the use of multimedia.

### **Closing the Loop**

Results of this year's assessment suggest that the Modern Languages program is educating its majors well, with areas for improvement.

As the 2015-2016 Modern Languages Assessment Score results indicate, the program is exceeding expectations for SLOs 3.0 and 4.0. Listening comprehension (SLO 3.0) in particular improved dramatically with an increase from 3.55 to 3.9 or 88% proficiency in 2014-2015 to 97.5% in 2015-2016. This can be attributed in part to the incorporation of more multimedia materials into our courses. The use of video segments in online workbooks for elementary Spanish courses and the use of new multimedia textbooks for French 202 and French Conversation are good examples of positive program changes. Students also exceeded expectations in reading comprehension (SLO 4.0). This is most likely due to our program's current emphasis on literature and effective reading strategies taught in our Introduction to Reading Course that was added to our curriculum in all languages.

The 2015-2016 assessment scores demonstrate that the area most in need of improvement is SLO 5.0 or culture. Compared to last year, the average proficiency decreased from 4 to 3.4 or from 100% to 85%. This may be due to the fact that two of our graduates had not studied abroad. In the past, Spanish majors were able to spend a semester in Cuernavaca, Mexico, but that program was put on hold due to violence in the region. New plans are being made for a study abroad program in Spain. In 2015-2016, Modern Languages faculty identified two possible partner universities near Madrid where we might pursue a study abroad relationship. In the meantime, faculty are incorporating more culture into the classroom in 2016-2017 using multimedia resources.

Writing proficiency (SLO 2.0) has in the past been an area in need of improvement. In 2013-2014, assessment data suggested that students were experiencing difficulty in the area of writing. Based on the data, the Modern Languages faculty totally retooled their instructional methods in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 to better emphasize writing as a process. Outcomes from these changes were positive, as the average writing scores increased from 3.27 in 2015 to 3.4 in 2016 or by 3.82%. This past year one graduate's scores may have been impacted by a learning disability. Modern Languages faculty have discussed ways of helping students overcome such challenges in the future, including reaching out to the Francis Marion office of Counseling and Testing for information and resources pertaining to teaching divergent learners. Another resource we may have underutilized in the past is the campus Writing Center. While WC staff may not be able to help students revise target-language papers, they can present instructors and students with useful tips to improve writing in any language. In addition to reaching out to these two campus resources, faculty have been encouraged to incorporate more writing assignments and to place a greater emphasis on writing as a process during the 2015-2016 calendar year, in hopes of continuing the increase in proficiency levels for SLO 2.0.

Finally, speaking proficiency (SLO 1.0) continues to be an area for needed improvement, although student scores increased from 3.13 in 2014-2015 to 3.4, in 2015-2016 or nearly 8% (7.94%). This may be due to the fact that the two Spanish graduates were heritage speakers, and the French graduate had studied abroad. Nevertheless, research shows us that language comprehension tends to develop ahead of language production, both in one's native language during childhood and when learning a foreign language. Thus, Modern Languages faculty are constantly looking for new ways to improve the speaking proficiency of our students. In 2016 the French program in particular replaced a textbook that relied heavily on grammar lessons to a more conversational textbook for the French 202 course, and incorporated a new textbook for upper-level French Conversation that provides more opportunities for classroom conversational practice. As mentioned before, the Spanish program is actively pursuing a new study abroad program that will allow students to spend a semester in Spain, which should provide more opportunities for students to improve speaking proficiency outside of class. Language tables are another opportunity for students to continue to practice oral communication in the target languages during the 2016-2017 academic year.

### **Other Actions Taken For Program Improvement**

The Modern Languages program continues to make a great effort at recruitment and retention of quality majors, which corresponds to the French graduate's suggestion of better advertising our programs. In Fall 2015, a "Muffins with Modern Languages" Open House offered prospective students information about the Modern Languages Majors, Minor, Collateral, and Study Abroad programs. In Spring 2016, a Modern Languages Career Information session was organized through which several recent graduates in Modern Languages shared their experiences in using their degrees and language skills in post-graduate professional situations. Over 50 Francis Marion University students attended the event and two students subsequently declared French majors. The placement of students in foreign institutions through our international exchange programs also continues to be of great benefit to our French students, and should positively impact all SLOs. In Spring 2016, two French students participated in the semester exchange program with the University of Caen in Northern France and French faculty have begun

recruiting efforts for the Spring 2017 semester abroad. Finally, the Modern Languages program has successfully recruited and hired two new native speakers of Spanish. The addition of Dr. Edgar Larrea and Ms. Isabel Berakis to our classrooms in 2016-2017 should have a positive impact on all five of our program's SLOs, as students will benefit from more exposure to native Spanish speakers and the wealth of cultural information that the two new faculty members bring to our program at Francis Marion University.