Overall Plan for Assessment in the French Program

In the French department we have two tasks that frequently merge but that, for the sake of this process of self-assessment we propose to view separately and at two levels of the curriculum.

1. The first part of this process, in which we have already been engaged extensively but propose to improve, is the assessment of French language aptitude, both written and spoken. Since “focused” language instruction generally takes place in the student’s first two years at the college, this part of the assessment process will largely focus on freshman and sophomores—though a handful of juniors and seniors who are fulfilling language requirements late or have decided to add another language, may be included as well.

2. The other part of our assessment will focus on a smaller and more self-selected group: our majors. Here, we propose to create a list of students as they declare. From the moment of declaration, we propose to write up a short report on each student, which will quantify that student’s critical writing skills at that particular moment in time and will give us a standard against which to judge their progress through the French curriculum. Because so many of our majors go abroad for a semester or a year during their junior years we are also going to establish a miniaturized version in the senior year of this overarching major-declaration-to-graduation assessment. In this latter process, we will begin with senior conference and finish with the evaluation of the senior writing project (of which we have several permutations designed for the needs of individual students).

The Language Program:

Our language program has been undergoing constant closed loop assessment for many years. In particular, we have entry and exit exams that we have used in order to test speaking, writing, and listening skills. These exams are used as a placement tool as a gateway into the language sequence. They are applied again at the end of the program as a means of determining an individual student’s progress as well as cumulatively providing data about the effectiveness of our methodologies and the sequence as a whole. We have also used these tools to determine the specific differences between our intensive and standard language tracks thus maximizing the overall purpose of such testing.

The Teagle Foundation Grant offers us the opportunity to actually further standardize our approach. Over the summer Pim Higginson and Penny Armstrong designed a placement exam on moodle that contained both written and oral components. This was very effectively used as a placement tool over the summer and we will be using it again this coming year. Because of this early success, rather than using different tests at various points in a student’s progress as we have in the past, starting this year we will use the same test at each point in the assessment process thereby providing strictly comparable data rather than somewhat more subjectively comparable data. We think this will provide us a highly precise set of data and thus an even better sense of how to work with the finer details of the language program as we go forward.

The exam itself can currently be accessed at:
https://moodle.brynmawr.edu/course/view.php?id=2200
The objectives implicit in the exam but expressed here are simple:

1) Fluency in oral French as an active listener of the language
2) An extensive grasp of vocabulary from the most commonly used words to the increasingly idiomatic and esoteric.
3) A control of the rules of the most basic to the most complex rules of French grammar

Since the test very accurately determines where a student is in relation to these categories upon entry into the program, repeating the test at set intervals provides an accurate map of student progress and a highly effective assessment tool.

The French Major and Critical Writing in the Discipline

At this level, the assessment points will be those that might be used for any other writing based class such as English or Comparative literature with the difference that these tools are being applied to a French and/or Francophone field of knowledge. Skills such as effective research, the constitution of a coherent and fully developed bibliography, the construction of a coherent argument, the proper use of citations, etc. will all be determined and their enhancement mapped over the course of the student’s time in the major (usually Sophomore to Senior year) to the extent to which this is possible. It should be noted that many of our students travel abroad during their junior years and therefore there will be some limitations as to how closely we can follow certain student’s progress. This process will culminate in a close monitoring of progress in the senior year.

In order to determine progress in this regard, student’s current skill level (upon declaration) will be entered onto a moodle site adapted for this purpose.

On that site, accessible only to those who teach in the department, an evaluation will be made of the student at that point in the curriculum. For each student, a rating will be given that will assess the following:

1) Language Assessment
   - Fluency of spoken French (using the ILR Proficiency scale (ILR 1-Elementary, ILR 2-Limited Working, ILR-3 Professional Working, ILR-4 Full professional, ILR- Native or bilingual proficiency). This evaluation will pick up where the previous assessment system left off.
   - Fluency and accuracy of written French

2) Critical Writing Assessment
   - Ability to produce a vibrant thesis and to sustain a complex, original, and coherent argument based on a primary text (conceived broadly)
   - Ability to use and cite primary sources effectively both stylistically and rhetorically
   - Ability to find, use and effectively cite secondary sources
   - Ability to constitute and employ an extensive bibliography. (Location of key texts in the field, good distribution of theoretical texts, texts applicable to the broad field determined by the writer, and critical works specific to the object being analyzed, and annotation of each work being used).
This list is presented in order of importance and in order of acquisition. As a student progresses through the major we expect her to add to her skill set moving down this list. Stated differently, we do not expect students who have just declared a major in French to have the research skills or the experience in the usage of citations to score highly on the last two criteria. We do expect them to be gaining increased exposure to these processes as they move through the curriculum, culminating in the Senior Conference in which the entire course will be focused on research, reading, and writing techniques aimed at training them for the production of the senior conference. Thus, at the beginning of senior conference they will be asked to produce a diagnostic essay that will give us a sense of where they stand on these various criteria. Another assessment (in the form of a final essay for the class) will be done at the end of the course (which ends in December). The final assessment will take place in the form of the senior project (an essay that can take several forms).

All of this information will be tracked on the moodle site designed specifically for this purpose.