

A Study of Foreign Language Learning Outcomes Assessment in U.S. Undergraduate Education

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Abstract: *This article reports on findings obtained from an online survey answered by 97 foreign language department chairs. The Web survey was pilot tested for validity and reliability and obtained a Cronbach's reliability coefficient of .80. The results suggest that student learning outcomes assessment in American undergraduate foreign language education combines performance-based and traditional assessments. The use of translation as an assessment method supersedes the application of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and exit exams to gauge language proficiency. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the National Standards are common in the assessment of oral proficiency, but infrequent in the development of assessment procedures of other skills. The article also reports on obstacles that institutions face in the implementation of standards-based assessments (e.g., OPI and portfolios).*

Key words: *assessment of learning outcomes in foreign languages, foreign language assessment in undergraduate education*

Language: *relevant to all languages*

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, outcomes assessment of student learning has been central to the accountability debate in American higher education (Astin, 1987). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, pressure for accountability from the government, taxpayers, and policymakers initiated a systematic student outcomes assessment movement that has increasingly made higher education institutions responsible for documenting the quality of their students' learning. Consequently, colleges and universities are required to evaluate and report not only what students have learned, but also how they perform with their acquired knowledge (Banta, Black, Kahn, & Jackson, 2004; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Beno, 2004; Bray & Belcher, 1987; Cross, Wiggins, & Hutchings, 1990).

A growing interest in performance assessment started with the works of Grant Wiggins (1989, 1991, 1998). In his view, student learning is better documented when standards for performance inform the assessment procedures. In language education, attention to performance assessment, as opposed to the measurement of knowledge, occurred due to the publication of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

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