

Institute Review: Evaluating Curriculum



By Hilary Fisher, University of Oregon

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In the midst of a predictably gray Oregon December, a colleague sent me an email about a summer institute...in Honolulu!

The invitation to the institute, entitled "Developing Useful Evaluation Practices in College Foreign Language Programs," intrigued me with its promise to:

- Engage in useful, practical, and effective program evaluations for a variety of purposes
- Provide language educators with a user-oriented approach
- Provide tools and strategies for making program evaluation a systematic and consistently useful component

This workshop intrigued me as it promised strategies to help answer many of my questions about the first-year French program I coordinate at the University of Oregon, such as:

- How do I know what aspects of our curriculum are most helpful in increasing students' language development?
- How well prepared are students at the end of the first-year program? Are they ready for second year?
- What are our goals for students who are taking French to fulfill their two-year language requirement?
- How do I look at all program

aspects (curriculum, instruction, classroom experience) to understand what would optimize the experience for students and enhance their performance?

I was fortunate to participate in one of the best professional and practical trainings ever. Sponsored by the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawaii, the institute selected twenty-three participants from college foreign language departments throughout the United States. The institute highlighted the importance of foreign language program evaluation and provided the stimulation and tools for participants to work on our own designs.

I quickly became aware of the impact a good evaluation project could have on a foreign language program

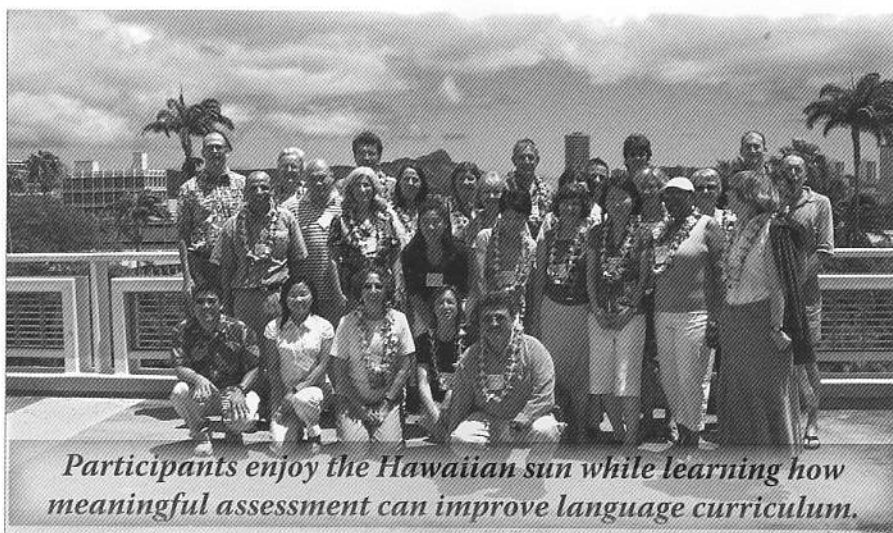
overall quality of a program, enhance student learning, and provide specific guidance for improving or maintaining program features. When faculty view the program as a whole, they become familiar with and invested in the overall goals for language learning and the necessary steps to reach those goals. Evaluation "evidence" contributes to a process of continual program improvement and yields information that can enhance the visibility and appreciation of a foreign language program within the larger institution.

The institute proved to be an intensive experience. By the end of the first few days, I had learned a whole new vocabulary and became excited about designing a project. I left with the skills, confidence, and support to pursue answering the questions I had upon arrival. The institute also

created a network of participants, establishing an available ongoing peer resource as we continue with our own projects. 🤝

Editor's note: One of fifteen language resource centers (LRCs) across the country, the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawaii holds annual professional development

institutes. Learn more about their programs by visiting their Web site at <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/>. Search for other LRC-sponsored workshops by visiting <http://nflrc.msu.edu/>.



Participants enjoy the Hawaiian sun while learning how meaningful assessment can improve language curriculum.

and ultimately a whole department. I realized that evaluation is much more than testing. Done effectively and put to use (an important qualifier), assessment can improve the