

The Practicality and Efficiency of Web-Based Placement Testing for College-Level Language Programs

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Abstract: *Articulation is one of the principal challenges of all foreign language programs. A key component of the articulation process is an assessment of student language abilities. On college and university campuses this process is usually conducted via a placement test. As developments in proficiency research have progressed, it is clear that programs need information about a student's grammatical command of a language as well as about their integrative use of the language specifically in speaking. This article examines the process of having students test online before their arrival on campus and provides insights into efficiencies brought about by such testing. The data for the article were generated by 679 learners of Spanish and 78 learners of German as well as by their 14 instructors and 2 language program directors.*

Introduction

Byrnes (1990) cautioned that as foreign language curriculum theory becomes more multifaceted, acknowledging the components of language proficiency, the need for more precise articulation from one curriculum into another would become more complex and more critical. At present, within the context of the Standards Movement and radical shifts in high school foreign language curricula characterized by greater inclusiveness, Byrnes's caution has become a prophesy. The front line of articulation, although admittedly by no means the only dimension of that articulation, is placement testing. Indeed, the placement of students into courses in an effective and efficient manner is one of the primary challenges faced by large-scale university foreign language programs. Students demand a timely placement that accommodates their foreign language knowledge and deserve a placement that is challenging without being frustrating. Teachers demand placement mechanisms that enable them to calibrate their instruction to the needs of entering students and deserve ones that facilitate the design of tasks that help students learn in the language.

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