



Spanish & Latin American Studies | 2017-2018 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

For 2017-2018, the Modern Languages program decided to assess the following learning outcome: “Students graduating with a (Spanish) major are expected to research literary and cultural topics and report findings.” For the purpose of the assessment, mid-term and final essays, as well as mid-term and final oral presentations in two Spanish upper level courses were assessed. The courses were:

SPAN 351 Spanish and Latin American Fiction (Immigrant Voices)

SPAN 355 Spanish and Latin American Cinema

Oral presentations: (mid-term and final)

In both courses, the results of the students’ work assessed in the oral presentations were satisfactory. The large majority of the students displayed satisfactory or very satisfactory research skills and ability to present and document findings in an oral presentation format. Satisfactory or very satisfactory results were measured with a rubric that included the following categories: students’ display of factual knowledge, cultural understanding, and linguistic competency (the latter not included in the assessment results of this academic year). The work assessed showed that in 90% of the cases, the students’ presentations displayed adequate research and good use of presentational competences, including use of technology and digital support to enhance and illustrate major points during presentations. In terms of content, almost all of the students demonstrated an ability to provide cultural information with considerable understanding of nuance and the large majority demonstrated a satisfactory ability to explain and relate a specific cultural aspect within a larger social and historical context.

Written essays (mid-term and final)

In both courses, the results of the written assessment showed very good results as well. The major difficulty the students’ work reflected was adopting discipline-specific citation style such as the MLA for the written essays. The use of MLA style was required for all written assignments in both courses, but no class time was devoted early in the semester to deliberately teach this specific formatting and citation style. To assist students, a summary of how to use the MLA style was made available in the D2L pages for the courses. Students were also referred to the Cofrin Library 3rd floor for assistance with citation. While there was an improvement between the mid-term essay assessment results and the final essay assessment results, about one-third of the students’ written work in both classes showed deficiencies in citation skills at the end of the semester. While still significant, this was an improvement from midterm essays, where almost half of the students showed critical issues with citation (i.e. not listing the page number for a citation).

Currently, acquiring citation style techniques is not part of the learning objectives of the Spanish program nor of any of the Spanish courses. As a result, MLA citation is not explicitly taught in any of the courses. Moreover, there is not a consistent approach across the Spanish curriculum regarding requiring the use of MLA in essays.

Another issue that surfaced during this assessment exercise is that a significant number of students failed to distinguish between scholarly from non-scholarly sources. About 1/5 of students in SPAN 355 and 1/8 in SPAN 351 incorporated under "Works cited" information of uneven quality. They cited blogs or non-academic sources along with academic journals, displaying an inability to evaluate the worth of their sources.

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected?

The Spanish faculty need to discuss more what role that learning a discipline specific formatting and citation style such as the MLA, APA or other play in the curriculum in order to come up with a consistent approach. If the Spanish faculty decides not to require students to use MLA style for written assignments, then at least a simplified version of the MLA, APA or other need to be adopted in order to standardize formal citation mechanics across the curriculum. In any case, some class time needs to be devoted to teaching and practicing with the students proper citation before written assignments are due. Some students are familiar with MLA because of classes they have taken where this citation style was required, but a significant number of students are unfamiliar.

In addition, class time needs to be spent discussing with students the difference between credible sources of information and non-credible, and to help them recognize the difference between opinions and scholarship in their own research.