

Chapter 9: Undergraduate Discipline Spotlight

The Modern Language major features three language specializations: Modern Language: French, Modern Language: German and Modern Language: Spanish. Many of our students continue into Truman's Master of Arts in Education program in French and Spanish, a professional teaching degree, with the goal to deliver K-12 language instruction in Missouri's public school system. The three Modern Language programs prepare students for professional life after graduation by providing multiple curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to engage in the following activities: write in a variety of personal and professional contexts, engage in conversation and make formal presentations in the modern language, read and understand texts written for a native speaker audience, interpret between spoken languages in a variety of situations, translate written messages and texts from one language to another, mediate between two or more modern languages, adapt to other cultures and navigate between them and their own, understand diverse perspectives with empathy and openness, reflect on one's own culture in relation to others and better comprehend and communicate in one's own language. Faculty within the major utilize several assessment instruments to comply with University graduation requirements and to track student performance. These instruments will be outlined below.

An initial comment on the Modern Language program's design will provide context for the assessment initiatives associated with the major. Truman's Modern Language degree is designed to foster students who exemplify key components of Truman's mission statement, the strategic plan, and the vision statement. Our programmatic mission of "cultivating students whose language and intercultural skills provide them with a competitive edge" not only aligns with the University's liberal arts and sciences mission, but it forms one of the centerpieces of that mission, exemplified by both the intercultural and foreign language components of the Interconnecting Perspectives portion of the Dialogues Curriculum. Every student in our courses, from the 101 level to the Capstone course for the major, learns to view the world through an intercultural perspective. Many of our majors study abroad, which strengthens and deepens their intercultural abilities. At this time, we do not have an instrument that assesses the level of the intercultural competence of our students. In fact, it is doubtful that such an instrument exists.

The first degree-wide assessment item for our majors is the senior test. Graduating seniors in all three of the Modern Language major's language specializations—French, German, Spanish—take the *Praxis World Language* exam for their respective language. The *Praxis* exam is a comprehensive exam, covering all four language skill areas—Interpretive Listening, Interpretive Reading, Interpersonal and Presentational Writing, and Presentational and Interpersonal Speaking—plus a Cultural Knowledge section. This is a computer-delivered exam that takes approximately three hours for students to complete. They take the exam at the Assessment and Testing Office in Violette Hall 1130.

The second common assessment item for our majors is the Capstone course, which students take when they are seniors. Through our Capstone course (CML 470: Modern Language Capstone Experience), we assess our students' language proficiency—both written and oral, critical thinking and analytical abilities through writing, and content area knowledge. The requirements for this culminating experience include a substantive research paper written in the language of the individual student's specialization, and a presentation in a public forum in which students share the results of their research, using a PowerPoint

or other media to illustrate the content of their project. During COVID, students presented via Zoom. Faculty who serve as mentors for our Capstone students provide a copy of Truman's Critical Thinking rubric to each student and discuss each category with the student, underlining the fact that the subsequent assessment of the Capstone project will adhere to this rubric. As is the case with many majors on campus, Modern Language majors complete and submit the Senior Portfolio in conjunction with their Capstone project.

Another aspect of assessment within the Modern Language major involves the STAMP exam, which is a requirement for students who seek admission to the MAE program in French or Spanish. Avant STAMP 4S is a web-based general language proficiency assessment of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking skills. The Benchmark levels for this exam are Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced, with sub-levels low, mid, and high. MAE candidates are expected to reach the Intermediate-High proficiency level in all four skill areas of the exam.

Recently, the Modern Language program became the first program on campus to offer a Micro-credential—the Intermediate Spanish Proficiency Micro-credential—as part of Truman's initiative to offer stackable micro-credentials to both Truman students and non-Truman students. Requirements include: **(1)** passing Truman's SPAN 202: *Intermediate Spanish II* course and **(2)** reaching at least the Intermediate Mid-level on the STAMP test in each of the four tested skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

To conclude our overview of assessment with respect to the Modern Language major, we should mention the campus-wide foreign language placement exam process, since it involves all Truman students. All incoming freshmen and transfer students take the automated WebCAPE 2.0 exam, marketed by the company emersion, which offers language assessments in Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. The department's foreign language placement coordinator then places the student in the correct level of their language of choice, based on a combination of the result of the placement exam, how many years of language instruction the student has had at the high school level, and their grades in those high school courses.