Introduction

In Spring 2011 the French faculty proposed two major changes aimed at making the students more aware of the abilities they are expected to demonstrate at various junctures of their coursework. The changes were:

- to reword the SLOs descriptors as outcomes, emphasizing what the students will be able to accomplish and how they will meet the learning objectives;

- the adoption in all courses of a grading rubric according to the following four criteria – 25% each for 1. content, 2. organization, 3. academic standards, 4. grammar & spelling.

Data were collected during the AY 2011-2012 in two graduate seminars and one undergraduate course in which several graduate students were enrolled.

Rewording: The rewording of the SLOs stresses the need for the students to demonstrate they have acquired the competencies. In FREN 210, instruction, assignments, and tests were designed as opportunities for the student to demonstrate their ability to use information technologies for research and presentations. The course being online and focusing on a few selected practical topics, it was a perfect candidate for this objective and the students all understood the expectations.

Rubric: The students welcomed the rubric as a tool for preparing their research papers. The quality of these papers generally improved in regard to organization and compliance with MLA style. In regard to content the next section on SLOs 1a, b, c details some concerns about analytical methodology and scholarly perspective that need to be addressed. In the grammar and spelling area, 50% of the students continue to make too many mistakes that result in lower grades.
Another major change this year was to require that all new students and students beginning thesis work enroll in FORL 200, Graduate Research and Writing. We believe that this course had a positive effect on the students' performance when evaluated by the grading rubric by placing more emphasis on demonstrating progress in reaching the goals. It also made students more aware of the objectives of the program.

**Assessment of Learning Objectives**

**SLO 1 The students will be able to analyze cultural productions from the following perspectives:**
- a. Historical and cultural
- b. Linguistic and stylistic
- c. Literary and literary theory

**Initial Evidence of Student Learning**

In our Fall 08 assessment report we noted that "[...] students have difficulty distinguishing between simply making superficial descriptions of a work and analyzing in depth and drawing conclusions ("connections") using a critical approach based on their findings as to, for example, the thematic and stylistic characteristics of a work or a series of works within a single course and, especially, across several courses or what is commonly referred to as "interrelatedness of knowledge."

**Discussion**

The students' ability to analyze cultural objects using appropriate analytical tools and terminology was examined in FREN 210 through two mid-term essay questions and a dossier of reviews of ten multimedia objects designed for educational, cultural, or professional purposes. The students were free to choose the electronic resources they wanted to include in their dossier, provided these resources belonged to the required categories (instructional, professional, cultural). They were encouraged to start building their dossiers early in the semester, to discuss the objects from a scholarly perspective, demonstrating their purpose and benefits for an educated audience. They had the opportunity throughout the semester to experiment with various instructional functions in D2L, to explore databases and software, and to discuss various aspects of quality assessment in class and via a discussion forum.

In the first mid-term, the answers to the essay questions (e.g. "Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online instruction") lacked depth, description, scholarly perspective, and use of proper terminology. Most of the students answered the questions as if they were asked to give their personal opinion. With a short explanation they all agreed that to analyze is different from giving an opinion. After this first mid-term the students were presented with models of answers, and the following assignments included similar questions (e.g. "What issues are involved in the debate about copyright and what are possible solutions?"). In the final exam, the essay questions were chosen among the list of topics discussed in class, in the forum, or drawn from additional readings. Most students showed significant progress in their postings in the class forum and in their term presentation.

Their progress was less significant in the final oral presentation (which we will discussed below) and in the term project (dossier). For the latter, they had to develop the content by themselves. The only strict guideline for the dossier was to choose objects (websites or software) that fit in three given categories. The majority of the students didn't use the categories (which corresponded to the sections of the course) and they treated the websites one by one, switching from instructional to professional and then to cultural sites, often without observing logical order or justifying the sequence they adopted. This indicates that the students don't understand the purpose and benefits of categorization in analysis.
In spite of this weakness in analytical methodology, the majority of the students demonstrated advanced command of specialized vocabulary (terminology) in their dossier and final written exams.

A few students tend to discuss their experiences rather than to analyze from a neutral perspective. At the graduate level, the students need to practice writing in the academic genre, using the tools and level of language that are appropriate in scholarly publications. Dossiers, papers, exams must be taken as formative assessment in preparation for theses and comprehensive exams.

**Recommended Change(s) to Curriculum or Pedagogy**

1. Develop a guideline that will be used as self-evaluation or checklist for written analyses and research papers, and distribute it to the students at the beginning of the semester or when explaining the assignment that it pertains to (see example in SLO 3 below).

2. Devote a class session to the reading and discussion of an article that can serve as a model for the assigned analysis. Insist on the rules of the genre, neutrality of tone, low incidence of personal commentaries, use of specialized terminology, and logical demonstration in academic writing.

3. Indicate in the greensheet SLOs that are being assessed and tie them to specific assignments.

4. Assign several short analyses on various subjects (an artwork, poem, song, photograph, website, etc.) rather than one large summative term paper.

**Evidence of Student Learning after Change**

This SLOs will again be assessed for implementation of the evaluation form.

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**SLO 3** The students will be able to make scholarly presentations.

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**Initial Evidence of Student Learning**

[Spring 2008]
"In making presentations, the students also need guidance [...]."

[Spring 2011]
Data collection/Discussion:
"As noted with regard to SLO7, students rely excessively on websites for their information. Given that PowerPoint presentations are more and more common, students need further guidance on what is appropriate and not appropriate to include. The reading of long passages and often long citations, for example, during any type of presentation needs to be discouraged. Organizational issues revolving around content, length and logical progression of ideas also often make the students’ presentations less effective in articulating, communicating and drawing conclusions based on a synthesis of the information they have provided. Other issues or details dealing with their general conduct also need to be addressed and quantified for the purpose of evaluation and giving valuable feedback to students with regard to their oral presentation proficiency."

[Fall 2011]
In FREN 250 the instructor observed that "the students' presentations were too general, somewhat superficial, and not very well organized. Such presentations were comprised mostly of biographies of authors and statements not supported by any examples or lacking evidence of critical thinking on the subject. The presentations failed to engage the class and to elicit discussion afterwards."

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Change(s) to Curriculum or Pedagogy

[Spring 2012]
1. In FREN 250, students were required to submit a draft of their oral presentation at least one week in advance for instructor feedback and possible error corrections. This was formative assessment, as well as an opportunity offered to the students to improve their work before the final evaluation.

2. In FREN 210, SLO 3 was evaluated by one term presentation and one final oral exam, both on assigned topics. The students were given the general rubric and were required to send an outline and all documents they planned to distribute to the instructor a few days before their presentations.

3. In FREN 140A, an evaluation form for oral presentations was distributed to the students. The students were asked to use this form as a guideline while preparing their presentations. Based on a rubric similar to the generic one adopted by the M.A. program this year, the form stresses:
   a) scholarly content and relevance to the course subjects;
   b) clarity and organization;
   c) resources and bibliographical references (10% of the overall grade);
   d) in-class performance.
   Since the form was distributed to the students before they started researching their topic, they were able to evaluate their own work as it progressed.

Evidence of Student Learning after Change

[Spring 2012] In FREN 140A, a week before presenting in class, the students sent their visual aids (usually PowerPoint slides) as well as their presentation notes. They were instructed not to have too much text on the slides. Students were very responsive and used the evaluation guideline in their preparation. Most of the presentations ended with a lively discussion of the topic and succeeded in engaging the class. The average grade for these assignments was 94%. The students were able to understand the grading of this assignment and explain the differences in relation to the various items in the evaluation form. The self-evaluation process clearly helped the students develop effective, intellectually stimulating, and engaging presentations.

In FREN 210, all students received the highest marks for their individual presentations done during the semester. In regard to scholarly content in this assignment, they demonstrated a high degree of understanding of this point. The final oral exams were less impressive for 80% of the students, and in a few cases, students demonstrated only rudimentary knowledge of the content of the websites or software being presented. This may be due to examination stress, but also to a lack of preparation and understanding of the objectives of this particular requirement. In general the presentations lacked a sense of purpose and failed to be intellectually stimulating. Time was not used effectively by seven out of ten students, and only two students began by laying out a clear, simple outline of the aspects they had chosen to cover.

Recommendation: Students must be able to evaluate their own work before presenting it. The guideline/evaluation form used in FREN 140A should be used in all graduate courses requiring exposés so that students know what they will be evaluated on. Pre-submission of visual aids should serve mostly as a means of ensuring that materials that will be projected or distributed in class are proofread for grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and style. It should not be a draft project that the instructors need to redo with the student.

SLO6  The students will be able to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the French-speaking world, from both historical and contemporary perspectives.
Initial Evidence of Student Learning
In our Fall 2008 report on assessment activities conducted in FREN 240 we wrote: “Even though students were overall successful in identifying cultural and literary features of the various Francophone regions and their literary production, students were less successful in comparing and contrasting these features.”

Change(s) to Curriculum or Pedagogy
In Spring 2012, in FREN 210, the resources were selected in order to reflect linguistic and cultural diversity among francophone countries in relation to the development of terminology databases and other linguistic tools. After having had the opportunity to take FREN 202 and/or FREN 240, students were expected to be sensitive to the diversity issues in francophonie and to draw upon their knowledge in their presentations, oral exams, and dossiers.

Evidence of Student Learning after Change
The students now know better the differences between the francophone countries, their individual struggle with languages, and the diverse solutions that they have developed. Can they explain these struggles and compare resources from different francophone countries? This is another question. In general, in their mid-term they could relate the difference in the terminology databases with the countries' situations, but several students ignore this connection. The final oral exam was disappointing in that respect: some students did not relate differences in terminology with the individual countries’ situations, discussing instead website design and color features, sometimes not even raising the question of why there would be, for example, three different French-English terminology databases. They rarely mentioned the historical, socio-economic, and cultural reasons that account for contemporary diversity. The fact that France and Belgium are part of the European Union, while Québec and other French-speaking regions in Canada are politically and commercially tied to other English-speaking Canadian provinces and to the U.S., was not taken in consideration when discussing terminology databases and translation.

This is a case of "interrelatedness of knowledge": even though the students had the opportunity to study several francophone countries and have developed some knowledge of their political and social features, they don't think of transferring and applying that knowledge in their other courses.

Recommendation: When appropriate, graduate and upper-division courses should include segments on linguistic policies, terminology, and translation in various francophone countries in order to stress the fact that diversity is not always a matter of choice but is often determined by the location of the countries and their commercial partners.

SLO7 The students will be able to use technology for scholarly research and presentations.

Change(s) to Curriculum or Pedagogy
FREN 210 moved from being a theoretical course in terminology and resources to becoming a practicum in instructional technology, tools for academic writing, and information science. The students were given instructor status to D2L practice shells, and they learned to use Elluminate to make presentations, share information with study groups, and rehearse for their presentations. They also received instruction and developed a dossier on internet resources for research, instruction, cultural, and professional purposes. All students who took FREN 210 are now able to:

Evidence of Student Learning after Change
1. Use video-conferencing for presenting or giving a class;
2. Explain the pros and cons of online instruction;
2. Use the style sheet function in MS Word in their papers;
3. Create interactive quizzes using that function in D2L;
4. Develop a list of links in French for their own research or to share with their peers or students;
5. Use proofing tools, the bibliography tool, and footnotes in word processing software;
6. Participate in online discussion forums;
7. Use terminology databases for specialized translation;
8. Use *Gallica* and the *BnF* catalog and incorporate the information in their research papers.

**Conclusion and General Recommendation**

1. As stated above, the most urgent need is to help the students develop their analytical skills to the level expected in graduate studies.

2. In order to continue to make the students more aware of the outcomes they should be able to demonstrate at the end of their studies, at the beginning of the fall 2012 semester we will distribute the *Assessment of Learning Outcomes* chart that we developed, and we will ask all students to rate themselves on a scale from 0 to 5 in regard to each program learning objective. The faculty will also rate each student's ability based on the demonstration the students will make in their individual courses and summative assessment:

   In the future this self-assessment form should be included in the LMS, and possibly in MYSJSU.

   **Example:**

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   3. The PLOs should mention quality of grammar and spelling in written assignments and possibly make a new SLO.

   4. All graduate course syllabi must state the projected outcomes or competencies and how the students will have to demonstrate that they have reached the objectives.

   5. FREN 299 syllabus will be distributed to the students who enroll in the course; expectations and outcomes should be clearly stated.

   6. Comprehensive exams should be redesigned in order to include more demonstration of abilities acquired during coursework.