Using the Northern Oral Proficiency Interview to Assess Foreign Language Majors

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

NOPI – Narrative

The Undergraduate Assessment Committee of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures elected to pair assessment data gathered through the collection of electronic student portfolios and through a simulated oral proficiency test.

The committee initially considered employing the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview created by the Center for Applied Linguistics and based upon the guidelines for oral proficiency established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Thorough review of CAL’s interview, however, proved that the departments’ assessment needs could be better served by adapting the original SOPI, thus the Assessment Committee created the Northern Oral Proficiency Interview (NOPI).

Two versions of the test were created so that questions could be alternated from semester to semester. The questions assume an oral proficiency level of at least intermediate and range through superior. Committee members adapted scoring rubrics from the original SOPI interview in order to assess the interview results.

Students who major in a foreign language must take an electronic portfolio course in or near their final semester. The NOPI is administered as part of the requirements for this course.

Training

Two Assessment Committee members from each language division (French, Spanish, German) completed the Rater Training program created by CAL. Initially, raters trained alone, then met to compare sample assessments in order to ensure that their individual assessments of students were comparable. Significant discrepancies in NOPI ratings would necessitate a third rating be completed by a third faculty member.

Raters score NOPIs in May each year. After a NOPI rater has served for two consecutive years, he or she will undertake the rater training of a new member of the faculty, and so on, so that eventually all of the faculty members in departments with major programs will have undergone the rater training and will have served as a NOPI rater for two consecutive years.

NOPI Goal Statement

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures employs the Northern Oral Proficiency Interview as a tool in its comprehensive assessment apparatus in order to measure the level of oral proficiency obtained by its language majors. The NOPI exam, combined with the electronic portfolio, provides the department with a holistic assessment of its majors’ target-language competencies. The department uses the results obtained from NOPI exams to adjust as necessary the oral component of its major language classes in order to obtain satisfactory results in NOPI ratings.