DEPARTMENT OF SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES (SLS)
ON-GOING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT
SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE
2004-2005
(Brown, Hudson, & Norris – 9/02)

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation activities have been a natural part of the Department of Second Language Studies (SLS, previously called the Department of English as a Second Language, or ESL) since the 1980s. The Department of SLS is responsible for four programs: SLS-B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies, SLS-M.A. in ESL, SLS Advanced Graduate Certificate, and SLS-Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This document provides an overview of those activities as they relate to the intended student learning outcomes of our four degree programs. For example, the outcomes for the MA program in ESL (our largest program) are summarized in the form of goals statements (adopted June 7, 1990):

Knowledge base for ESL teaching. Our graduates should understand the fundamental concepts of the knowledge base pertaining to ESL (and to varieties of English such as Hawai'i Creole English): linguistic analysis, English phonology and syntax, second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and language pedagogy. They should also understand how ESL relates to the larger educational and sociopolitical context.

Utilization of research. Our graduates should be able to understand and critically evaluate the current literature of ESL (and of related varieties of English) and engage in systematic investigation of the knowledge base to inform their own or others' teaching practices.

Classroom teaching. Our graduates will be competent classroom teachers. This means that they should be able to plan and manage an ESL class effectively and be able to evaluate and selectively apply a range of teaching strategies as appropriate to their students' needs and characteristics. For this purpose, they will need to be able to assess different teaching situations and the changing conditions in a classroom, so as to select appropriate teaching procedures and adapt to teaching students with differing learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

Curriculum. Our graduates will have the skills needed to design, implement, and evaluate a second language teaching program. This means that they will be able to conduct an analysis of students' needs; set course goals and objectives; design and revise tests; select, adapt and create materials; and evaluate the program overall or at the classroom level.

Professionalism. Our graduates should have a concern for reflective practice, so as to continue to improve as teachers. This means they should examine their own teaching practices critically and use appropriate strategies for improving their instruction. To this end, they will be able to engage in systematic investigation of their own and others' teaching and the knowledge base and theory necessary to support and improve language teaching practices and policies.

In addition, our graduates should acquire values so as to act in accordance with ethical standards and professionalism amongst colleagues, and to continue professional development for the duration of their career, seeking increased knowledge of themselves as students while remaining flexible and open to change. We expect our graduates to influence the field, guide its direction, and eventually take on leadership roles in ESL. They may expect to be involved in training and supervising other ESL practitioners. To do this, they will need the skills to communicate and interact effectively with their colleagues, in order to orient new teachers, to support teachers in the classroom, and to evaluate the teaching of others while giving effective feedback. In addition, they should be competent in professional communication. Our graduates will be able to communicate skillfully the results of their instructional successes and failures, and of their other systematic investigations concerning ESL through the full range of professional communication, both orally (e.g., at work or professional meetings) and in writing (e.g., through in-house reports and articles in professional newsletters and journals).

Summary of Assessment Activities in SLS

The summary table on the next page references the sections that follow (i.e., the footnotes [A], [B], [C], etc. are discussed in sections A, B, C, etc. in the text. Each of those sections describes the various data gathering tools that we have used over the decades, some of the results we have obtained, and, where appropriate, the ways we have used those results for the express purpose of improving teaching and learning (as well as assessment itself) within our degree programs and courses. Note that SLS approaches assessment—including data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and use—as cyclical and long-term processes; we focus our assessment efforts on selected areas of the program and selected kinds of assessment data to differing degrees at different times, depending on the areas that we (including students) deem most in need of attention. We also know that the assessment evidence most useful for making program-level improvements can only emerge through patterns over multiple years of data collection.

Department of Second Language Studies (SLS)
Summary of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to Date   (Revised 08/30/05)

Program	Dates of Activities	Populations Covered	Sample Size or Response Rate	Focus of Assessment	Data-gathering Approach	Results	Use of Results	Future Plans
SLS-B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies	On-going since 1980s	Students, Courses, Program, Instructors	All courses, instructors	Student learning outcomes; perceptions; job placement	Dept. course evaluation forms and Café online evaluation[A]	Students' satisfaction high; Job placement high	Curriculum revision & expansion	Development of new bilingual B.A. degree
SLS-M.A. in Second Language Studies (SLS)	On-going since 1980s	Students, Courses, Program, Alumni, Faculty	All students, courses, 40% alumni, Scholarly Paper (SP) readers, Thesis committees	Student learning outcomes; course effectiveness; program perceptions; employment placement; and satisfaction	Dept. course evaluation forms and Café online evaluation[A]; Capstone course (SLS 710) evaluation[B]; Final research projects ("Scholarly Papers" or MA theses)[C]; Student publications[D]; Survey[E]	Students' satisfaction high; Job placement high; Many publications by graduates	Curriculum revision & expansion; Feedback to students; Quality assurance; Scholarly paper evaluation process modified based on student feedback; Capstone course (SLS 710) created; Core course requirements revised	Moving toward development of differentiated M.A. degrees; Developing capstone course questionnaire; Ongoing consideration of new courses
SLS-Advanced Graduate Certificate (AGC)	On-going since 2002	Students, Courses, Program, Faculty	All students, SP readers	Student learning outcomes	Dept. course evaluation forms and Café online evaluation[A]; Final research projects ("Scholarly Papers")[C]; Student publications[D]; Survey[E]		Curriculum revision; Feedback to students; Quality assurance; Scholarly paper evaluation process modified based on student feedback	Program evaluation pending
SLS-Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	On-going since 1989	Students, Program, Alumni, Faculty	All students, ABD candidates, 40% alumni, Ph.D. committees	Student learning outcomes; Professional academic preparedness; perceptions; employment placement; and satisfaction	Dept. course evaluation forms and Café online evaluation[A]; Qualifying exams; Comprehensive exams; Final research projects (Dissertations)[C]; Student publications[D]; Survey[E]	Students' satisfaction high; Job placement high; High success rate on qualifying and comprehensive examinations (if all Ss succeed, are results meaningful?); High completion rate of high quality dissertations; Many publications by graduates	Curriculum revision & expansion; Feedback to students; Quality assurance; Evaluation of faculty and course area needs; Discontinued qualifying exam; Revision of major requirements, conduct of examinations, & dissertation supervision	Considering expansion of the number of Ph.D. students based on student feedback; Ongoing consideration of new courses

A. SLS Department Course Evaluations

Each course has a common final evaluation form (see Appendix A) that is completed by students during 30 minutes at the end of the semester. This evaluation covers course content and teacher performance. The results of these evaluation questionnaires are given to the teachers each term (after grades are turned in), are compiled in each professor's department file, and are reviewed by the department chair and DPPC during yearly contract renewals for assistant professors, as well as in considering tenure and promotion applications. Assessment findings are used to adjust course content and instructional practices. Additionally, some faculty members conduct mid-semester questionnaires addressing specific course objectives, content, and instructional features. The Department has just begun to offer an optional on-line survey unique to each faculty member and course to evaluate the extent to which students believe they have sufficiently mastered the key course-related learning outcomes. Faculty will use these surveys to evaluate specific course goals, content, and instructional practices.

B. Capstone Course

The capstone course for our M.A. in ESL degree program is SLS 710 - Teaching Second Languages. This course is typically taken in the final or penultimate semester of the student's degree program. This is a capstone course because it requires that students to have taken or be taking all of their other M.A. degree core courses. A questionnaire is being developed for students to evaluate the extent to which they have achieved the program's intended student learning outcomes. These involve: (a) knowledge base for ESL teaching; (b) utilization of research; (c) classroom teaching; (d) curriculum; and (e) professionalism. These questionnaires will help the departmental decision makers determine how adequately program goals are being addressed. The department committee that will develop this assessment is made up of faculty and students, thereby integrating students directly into assessment practices at the full program level.

C. Research Project Assessments in SLS Graduate Programs

Within our two graduate degree programs, the M.A. in ESL and the Ph.D. in SLA, as well as in our non-degree-granting AGC in SLS program, the SLS Department utilizes several formal and non-course-based assessments for the purposes of (1) assuring that standards of professional and academic quality are being met by students completing these programs, (2) providing feedback for the improvement of student learning and performance, and (3) gathering summative/formative information regarding the effectiveness of our curricular and instructional practices. In each case, assessments occur at critical junctures during the completion of program requirements, and assessment outcomes are used in specific ways by the SLS faculty, students, and others, as described below.

M.A. and AGC Programs

Scholarly paper. In both the M.A. and AGC programs, students are formally assessed at the end of their studies through the completion of a scholarly research paper (SP), though some students within the M.A. may opt to complete a more in-depth project in the form of a master's thesis (see below). The SP is usually based on a previously written term paper which has been subject to review and criticism within the context of a particular course, and it must be refined and upgraded to the quality of an article that would normally appear in standard refereed applied linguistics research journals. The SP is intended to function as a capstone research project, and it should provide one trustworthy indicator of the extent to which students have achieved both the research and scholarly writing learning outcomes intended within the two programs. A majority of graduates have completed an SP, with fewer students opting to do a thesis.

Prior to the late 1990s, SPs were based on projects that had initially been developed for a course, but were then further developed independently by each student without any consultation with a faculty advisor. That final product was assessed by two anonymously selected members of the faculty, whose decision regarding the acceptability of the product was final. Based on feedback gathered from graduate students and faculty advisors of SPs during the 1990s, this assessment system was changed in order to enhance the usefulness of the process. A three-step assessment approach is now in place. First, students select an advisor and submit a draft SP, for which they receive a first round of feedback and suggested revisions (always). Second, students select one additional reader from the SLS graduate faculty, and they submit the revised SP to both the advisor and the additional reader. Each of these faculty members assesses the quality of the SP according to a 5-point scale (Accept with Honors, Accept, Accept with Minor Revisions, Revise and Resubmit, and Unacceptable), and they provide written feedback on points for improvement. In assessing SPs, faculty focus on the importance of the problem addressed, scholarship, objectivity, soundness of procedure and method, clarity of presentation, insight, and perspective. Finally, students submit a third revised version for acceptance, and the two faculty readers make a final rating. This three-step approach, and especially the incorporation of a known faculty reader, has enabled the SP assessment process to better meet its goal of giving students rich and substantial feedback on their learning and performance in the crucial areas of research and writing.

Thesis. Typically a smaller number of students within the M.A. program complete a master's thesis, which requires at least 6 credit hours of directed research with a faculty advisor and usually requires at least one year for completion. Theses take a similar format to the doctoral dissertation, and they are intended to represent substantial, important, and rigorous research as well as thorough academic writing. Prior to embarking on thesis research, students must select a committee of at least three SLS graduate faculty members, and they must submit and defend a research proposal. This proposal process is intended to provide the students with specific feedback on issues of research theory, method, and design, and feedback is incorporated by the students into the research project. The students then work closely with a faculty advisor throughout the duration of the thesis project, including the submission of draft reports where appropriate. Final assessment of the thesis occurs in a public oral defense, prior to which the students have submitted a full report to the members of the committee. The committee renders a pass-fail decision and, in either case, provides students with substantial suggested and/or required revisions. Students who do not pass the thesis defense are afforded a second opportunity, following substantial revision and resubmission of the thesis report.

Assessment uses. Beyond the obvious feedback uses of the SP and thesis assessments, these performance indicators also provide a quality assurance mechanism and one source for faculty reflection on the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction within the M.A. and AGC programs. Thus, the SLS department cyclically reviews patterns within these assessment data in order to better understand the extent to which students are achieving the research and academic writing outcomes intended with these two programs. Most recently, for example, data from the SP assessments during 2003 and 2004 (through July) were reviewed. A total of 56 students submitted and completed the SP during the 18 months under review. Of these, no SPs were found to be "unacceptable", and this finding reflects the fact that faculty advisors provide students with substantial feedback prior to formal submission of a written product. At the opposite end of the assessment scale, 9% of the SPs were rated "accept with honors", reflecting the very high quality that is achieved by some of the students during the research and writing process. A much larger 36% of students were required to complete at least some revisions prior to final acceptance of the SP, and 4 of these were required to resubmit (indicating substantial revising and rewriting).

Overall, these patterns reflect the general trend that has been observed throughout many years of SP assessment, that is, with many students completing very good work prior to formal assessment, but with a substantial minority requiring revisions of some sort. Indeed, the SLS department interprets the need for revisions as a positive sign that the SP assessment is not functioning as a 'rubber stamp' of approval and that SP assessment is taken very seriously by both students and faculty. Along these lines, during the 18 months of review, the two faculty readers for any given SP agreed on their assessment rating approximately 80% of the time, while 20% of the ratings disagreed by one or more scale points. Once again, this general pattern of agreement—but with some discrepancy—has been interpreted as evidence in support of the use of two readers, who bring distinct areas of specialization to the assessment, and who therefore offer greater assurance of the comprehensive quality of the products (and the student learning that they imply). Finally, over the 18 months of SP review, students upgraded papers that had been written originally in at least 15 different SLS courses, a clear testament to the diversity of student and faculty research specializations. Had substantially fewer courses been represented within the SP pool (as has been the case in the past), this problem would have been explored in more depth. In summary, then, findings from this most recent round of cyclical review of assessment data have indicated no substantial need for changes in the existing curriculum and instructional practices, nor is there need for any further changes in the assessment process itself at this time.

Ph.D. Program

Comprehensive exams and dissertation proposal. Upon completion of required course work, and prior to advancement to "All-but-dissertation" status for the doctoral degree, students must complete both a series of comprehensive exams and a dissertation proposal defense. The comprehensive exams are used to ensure depth and breadth of knowledge in the areas of concentration within the degree program (second language analysis, second language use, second language learning, and second language pedagogy), and students are required to answer in writing, and within two weeks, three questions representing three of the four program concentrations. Questions are developed and agreed upon by the students' doctoral committees, which consists of at least four members of the SLS graduate faculty and one outside member. After submission of written answers, the committee conducts an oral examination, where the students are queried on the examination questions and related topics. Committee members then confer and establish a consensus decision regarding whether the students are well-prepared (high pass), sufficiently prepared (pass), or not prepared (fail) to continue towards completion of the doctoral degree. All students are provided with written and oral feedback on their performances, including in particular areas in which they are recommended to devote additional study. For those students who do not pass on the first attempt, they are specifically informed of their areas of deficiency, and they are given the opportunity to complete a second set of comprehensive exams. For students who do not pass the second time, continued study towards the Ph.D. degree is

not allowed unless a new and different dissertation topic is developed and a new comprehensive examination is administered.

The dissertation proposal defense functions according to a very similar format as that of the comprehensive exams, with the exception that the assessment performance takes the form of an in-depth research proposal for the dissertation. Thus, students submit extensive written plans, including review of the relevant literature and methodological description that will drive the dissertation research. Once again, the faculty committee provides substantial feedback and accepts or rejects the proposal, with the opportunity for revision. Most frequently, comprehensive exams and proposal defenses occur simultaneously, and upon completion, students are advanced to ABD status.

Dissertation. All students who are advanced to ABD status within the Ph.D. program must complete a dissertation research project and final report in order to graduate, and they must do so within seven years of initial enrollment in Ph.D. courses in the SLS department. These dissertation research projects may require multiple years of work and writing, and they may go through multiple rounds of feedback and revision (principally from the advisor). The doctoral dissertation is intended to represent one-of-a-kind, substantial, important, and rigorous research as well as professional-level scholarly writing. Final assessment of the dissertation occurs in a public oral defense, prior to which the student has submitted a full report to the members of the committee. In addition to questions about the dissertation research, per se, the committee may question the student more broadly about expected areas of academic expertise. Each member of the committee renders a pass-fail decision, and they achieve consensus on a final recommendation; in either case, the committee provides students with substantial suggested and/or required revisions. Students who do not pass the dissertation defense are afforded a second opportunity, following substantial revision and resubmission of the dissertation report.

Assessment uses. In addition to the use of the different assessment instances for providing feedback to enhance student learning, faculty committee members also look into patterns of exam and dissertation performance over time and across students, in order to identify areas of curriculum/instruction/assessment which may be in need of further attention or revision, and as a means for assuring the continued exceptional quality of graduates from the Ph.D. program. One example will illustrate these uses. Over the years since the inception of the Ph.D. degree (approved in 1988 and started in 1989), while most doctoral students have gone on to successfully complete these assessments, several have not. Thus, for example, not all students have received the required "pass" qualifications during the comprehensive exams (and repeated exams), indicating that faculty have not found their work and progress to be acceptable according to the expected levels of performance within the program, despite the provision of considerable feedback and recommendations regarding improved study and performance. Clearly, the assessment has been taken seriously as a quality control mechanism. Furthermore, the fact that some students have not passed the comprehensive exams has led the department to consider the effectiveness of curricular and other support offerings for Ph.D. students.

A second example of assessment use reflects on the cyclical nature of the formal assessment processes within the SLS Department. Between 1988 and 1996, an additional set of assessments was required of Ph.D. students in the form of qualifying exams. These exams were used to elicit evidence that students had mastered the basic areas of professional knowledge within each of the four emphases of the SLS program, and they took the form of a series of one-week written response to questions provided by faculty area experts. Upon passing the exam, students were advanced to candidacy for the doctoral degree, and subsequently, they were required to complete the assessments listed above. However, after eight years of using this qualifying exam system, faculty and students reflected on the extent to which exam outcomes had indicated that students were achieving expected levels of basic knowledge. It was found that students were taking an inordinate amount of time, sometimes as much as two years (often because of worries about the high expectations of faculty) to complete this "basic requirement". A decision to abolish the qualifying exams was taken in the belief that the basic admissions process and "pasic preparation courses" taken when necessary was sufficient indication of qualifying. Since the suspension of this exam in 1996, increasing numbers of students have been admitted to the Ph.D. program, and the program has experienced its first case of failure to advance through the comprehensive exam system. Therefore, at this time, the SLS Departmental Planning and Policy Committee has decided to revisit both the admissions standards/procedures for the Ph.D. degree program and the potential need for a Ph.D. qualifying exam.

D. Student Publications

Beginning in 1996, SLS decided to track the extent to which students were disseminating their scholarly work in the form of academic publications. Because one of the central learning outcomes for both the M.A. and Ph.D. degree programs includes not only the ability to carry out cutting-edge applied linguistics research and development work, but also the capacity and disposition to bring that work to fruition in the form of published articles, chapters, and books, the department elected to gather relevant information on a regular basis. Thus, each year, students are requested to provide a bibliography of their publications from the previous year, and an overall publications list (including student as well as faculty publications) is disseminated to the department, program alumni, and the public in the annual SLS Newsletter. These data (note that complete data are only available at the moment from 1996-2000) indicate how many publications were listed in association with student names, and they include: (a) single-author journal articles and book chapters; (b) single-author books; and (c) co-authored articles, chapters, and books.

Apparently, students do regularly publish scholarly work, *while enrolled in the SLS degree programs* (these data do not reflect additional works that graduates of the programs may publish after program completion). Of course, the frequency of publications has varied from year to year, but it is apparent that students have been very actively publishing over the years, and highlights among these publications since 1996 have included 10 books and three major (non-student-specific) scholarly awards, in addition to literally hundreds of articles that have appeared in major refereed journals in applied linguistics.

E. Graduate Student Survey

Several versions of a graduate student survey have been developed and administered over the decades. The most recent version is attached in Appendix B. Such surveys have been developed, administered, and reported to the Department faculty about every five years. The most recent administration was in spring 2001. The results of that survey were tabulated and reported to the Department faculty late in the same year. A number of curriculum revision issues were proposed and adopted on the basis of this student feedback including, but not restricted to, the following: revision of the scholarly paper evaluation process, the creation of a capstone course (SLS 710) for the M.A. program, rethinking faculty and course area needs within the department, revision of major requirements, conduct of examinations, and dissertation supervision. Plans are currently being formulated for revising, administering (to current graduate students and alumni), analyzing, and using the results of a new version of the survey.

Conclusion

In short, the Department of Second Language Studies has engaged in a cyclical process of assessing student learning outcomes for use in program evaluation and revision for decades, and we intend to continue gathering, analyzing, and using assessment results to benefit our students, our faculty, and the field of second language studies, nationally and internationally.

Appendix A:

SLS Department Course Evaluation Form

(rev. 11/87)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE STUDENT

WRITTEN EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SLS COURSES

The written evaluation questionnaire consists of two parts. Please note that the first part focuses on the course and the second part focuses on the instructor.

You will receive 2 sets of carbonized paper containing two pages each. What you write on the white sheet will automatically appear also on the yellow sheet. The white sheet will be placed in the faculty member's file and made available to the department chair and relevant departmental committees. The yellow sheet will not be given to the instructor until all grades have been recorded for the course.

PART I. THE COURSE

1. To what degree did this course meet the objectives stated in the course syllabus?

2. What is your overall evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the course? Consider such factors as the quality and quantity of reading assignments, papers, and tests.

3. What changes, if any, would you recommend be made in this course?

PART II. THE INSTRUCTOR

1. How able was the instructor in raising challenging questions, promoting independent thought, and encouraging student participation?

2. How able was the instructor in presenting relevant subject matter and clarifying readings?

3. What is your overall evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the instructor?

Appendix B:

Second Language Studies Graduate Questionnaire, May, 2001

TO: Graduate of the Department of Second Language Studies (formerly ESL)

FROM: Craig Chaudron, Graduate Chair, M.A. in ESL, Advanced Certificate in SLS, Ph.D. in SLA

RE: Value of MA and PhD degree

Please indicate the appropriate information by checking boxes or filling in blanks.

I. Identify the SLS program you graduated from at UHM:

        MA in ESL   □

        PhD in SLA   □

Year (and semester—if known) began:_____

Year (and semester—if known) graduated:_____

II. State your current location (by country at least, please): _____

III. Current academic or employment status:

1. Graduate student:

        Program: _____

        [MA, PhD, other (please indicate area)] _____

        Status in program (beginning, nearing completion, etc.) _____

2. Employment (identify at least one):

        A.   Retired:

        B.   Self-employed (state nature of work): _____

        C.   Employee in business:

            Large corporation   □

            Small business   □

        D.   Educational Institution (indicate type):

            Elementary School (public/private)   □

            Secondary School   □

            Tertiary   □

            Technical/Professional School   □

            Intensive (Adult) Language Program   □

        E.   Government:

            State Education Authority □

            National Government   □

            Military/Intelligence   □

        F.   Other (please describe): □ _____

3. Position/nature of work at employer or graduate school:

Please describe by title or other description: _____

	Little or none	A little	Some	A great deal	Total
Degree of independent responsibility (circle):	1	2	3	4	5
Degree of supervision of others:	1	2	3	4	5

4. Language used at work

Language(s) of **instruction** (target language if relevant):

    English   □

    Other (identify) □ _____

Language(s) used in **communication** with fellow workers:

    English   □

    Other (identify) □ _____

5. To what extent do you currently value the following features of the MA/PhD program at UH?

(On a scale from 1 to 7) (NA = Did not experience this feature at UH):

	Value very little					Value very highly		
Course work								
In L2 pedagogy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
In L2 use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
In L2 learning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
In L2 analysis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
In L2 research	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
In L2 testing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
Research project								
Plan A thesis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
Plan B/C Scholarly paper	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
Dissertation research	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

Please describe, if appropriate, changes in your studies and work/employment prior to your current position which indicate your advancement professionally.

Please describe any aspects of your course work that you now find especially useful to your current work.

Please describe aspects of your current work that imply other needed areas in the MA or PhD program.

Please comment on any other aspects of your studies at UH or relationships with the Department of SLS since your graduation that might be helpful to us in our continuing curriculum planning.