

Identifying and Responding to Evaluation Needs in College Foreign Language Programs



ACTFL Convention, Baltimore, MD
November 18th, 2005
10:15-11:30, Convention Center 324

John M. Norris & Yukiko Watanabe
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Identifying and responding to evaluation needs in college foreign language programs

I. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education, through its Title VI "International Research and Studies" grants, has funded a three-year project that seeks to articulate useful program evaluation practices and resources with the actual needs of college foreign language educators. The project is hosted at the University of Hawaii, and it involves a diversity of collaborators and participants. Primary constituents of the project are all tertiary-level foreign language programs in the United States.

Sponsor

US DOE
Title VI
International Research
and Studies
Grants

Key Collaboration

ADFL
ACTFL
NFLRC
LRCs
University of Hawaii

FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAM EVALUATION PROJECT

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Department of Second Language Studies

Personnel

Principal Investigator:
Dr. John M. Norris
Graduate Researchers:
Yukiko Watanabe
Marta González-Lloret

Constituency

US college FL programs:
• Departments
• Language Units
• Language Centers

"Useful evaluation in support of foreign language programs"



II. Need for the project: Why worry about program evaluation?

Foreign language programs in U.S. colleges are expected to meet critical educational, societal, and national needs for the development of learners capable of using languages other than English for a range of professional, academic, cultural, and other valued purposes. A key component of the effectiveness of any educational program is the inclusion of on-going evaluative processes, which enable educators to understand, improve, demonstrate, and ensure the quality of services and outcomes. Unfortunately, FL programs may not be prepared to incorporate evaluation processes into their practices, despite increasing impetuses—even requirements—to do so. Further, available guides for evaluation practice may lack meaning and utility in response to the specific needs, contexts, and constraints of actual college FL programs.

1. What do we mean by *evaluation*?

➤ Gathering trustworthy information about program elements and using that information to understand, improve, demonstrate, and ensure program value.

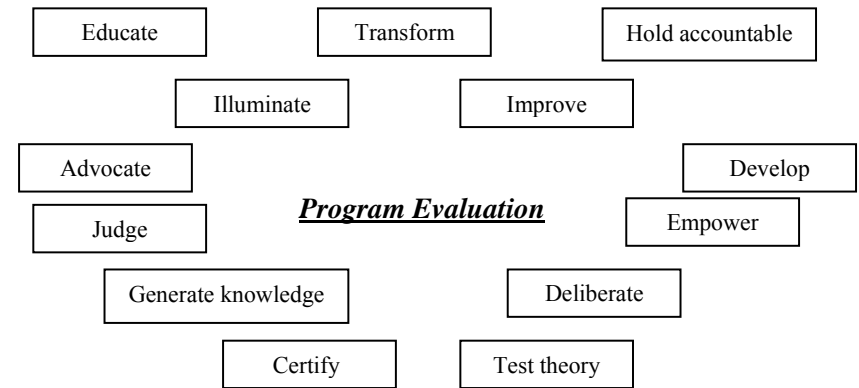
2. What are the *impetuses* for evaluation in college FL education?

➤ Traditional: (a) institutional program review, (b) teacher/faculty performance evaluation for tenure and promotion, (c) student decision-making

➤ Recent external impetuses: (a) accreditation in higher education, (b) standards of professional practice, (c) accountability-driven and evidence-centered education

➤ Recent internal impetuses: (a) achieving “advanced language learning”, (b) innovation in FL education (LCTLs and priority languages, technology-mediated instruction, bridging the language-content divide), (c) the “crises” of FL education

3. What are the potential *uses* to which evaluation can be put in college FL education?



4. What are the main *impediments* to useful evaluation in college FL programs?

<u>Systemic issues</u>	<u>Program symptoms</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Very little research and development on program evaluation specific to college FL education contexts ➤ Generic, decontextualized guides for evaluation models, practices, tools ➤ Lack of professional development in program evaluation methods ➤ Treatment of evaluation as a ‘HOW-TO’ rather than a ‘WHY’ problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resistance to evaluation ➤ Perfunctory response (let the chair do it) ➤ Reliance on external evaluators ➤ Uncertain/absent purposes for evaluation that does occur ➤ Lack of articulation with program values, curriculum, instruction ➤ Overgeneralization or wholesale adoption of ‘off-the-shelf’ tools (e.g., tests) ➤ Inappropriate and deleterious uses of evaluation methods ➤ Negative washback on teaching and learning



III. Purpose of the project: Building capacity for meaningful and useful evaluation

The *Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project* responds to apparent needs, gaps, and concerns related to evaluation at the tertiary level. Fundamentally, we seek to build the capacity of FL educators to engage with a variety of program evaluation demands in meaningful and useful ways. However, in order to achieve meaningfulness and usefulness, we must first understand the actual roles to be played by evaluation in the real contexts, and in light of the real constraints, of college programs. In other words, rather than producing generic models, tools, or mandates on ‘how to’ evaluate, we seek to understand the ‘why’ of evaluation first and foremost. Based on a sound empirical understanding of the actual purposes and contexts for evaluation, we then develop and disseminate a range of strategies and resources that are tailored to priority needs of real language programs. Finally, we investigate, revise, and improve these capacity-building strategies and resources through case studies of their meaningfulness and usefulness in representative college FL programs.

A foundational purpose of this project, then, is to investigate and articulate a comprehensive understanding of program evaluation needs in the actual contexts of college FL programs across the United States. Three research questions drive this portion of the project:

- RQ1: What are the primary uses and demands for evaluation in U.S. college FL programs?
- RQ2: What are the current capacities of U.S. college FL programs adopt/adapt/develop and use evaluation models, instruments, and procedures to meet primary demands?
- RQ3: What are the differences in evaluation demands and capacities across types of U.S. college FL programs, as distinguished by institutional and program size/setting, target language, and learner constituency?

Findings used by:

- **FL programs**, for understanding and relating their own evaluation demands, capacities, and constraints
- **Evaluation researchers, consultants, experts** for responding to actual evaluation uses/needs in college FL education, through research and practice
- **Project personnel**, for informing the development of capacity-building strategies and resources in response to priority needs

Another primary purpose of this project is to produce a variety of rigorous, accessible, and useful resources and strategies for planning and implementing program evaluation in college FL educational contexts. Two research questions motivate this portion of the project:

- RQ4: What key resources and strategies can be developed and disseminated for helping U.S. college FL programs increase their capacities to meet priority evaluation demands?
- RQ5: How can capacity-building resources and strategies be improved for better serving the evaluation needs of U.S. college FL programs?

Findings used by:

- **FL programs**, for implementing specific evaluation models, procedures, and tools articulated to their priority needs and in support of their programs
- **FL education community**, for addressing program evaluation capacity issues in terms of teacher development, program staffing, standards of practice
- **Project personnel**, for refining strategies and resources, and for improving their delivery to FL program constituents



IV. Project activities, objectives, and timeline

In order to respond in useful ways to the actual program evaluation needs of college foreign language educators, this project is proceeding through three phases of work over an initial three-year timeline. In Phase I, Needs Analysis, we identify the demands and uses for evaluation across a variety of college FL programs. In Phase II, Resource Development, we produce strategies, models, and tools that will help educators respond to priority evaluation needs. In Phase III, Field-Testing, we try out and revise evaluation resources, and we demonstrate their use and usefulness.

PHASE I

Project Personnel

- Review FL program eval literature
- Identify survey topics
- Develop online questionnaire, pilot, revise
- Initial, follow-up data collection
- Organize, code, analyze data
- Initial interpretations of needs/gaps
- Run focus-sessions at conferences
- Revise final interpretations



Objective 1: Identification of FL program evaluation needs and capacities

- ✓ Common evaluation uses across U.S. college FL programs
- ✓ Specific evaluation demands by college FL program type
- ✓ Range of FL program capacities for meeting evaluation demands
- ✓ Priority needs for capacity development, across programs and by type



College FL Constituents

- **ADFL, MLA, ACTFL** (generate awareness)
- **Small-sample FL participants** (pilot survey items)
- **College FL program administrators** (respond to survey, focus-groups)
- **Sample of college FL teachers** (follow-up triangulation of interpretations)

PHASE II

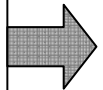
Project Personnel

- Review available program models, methods, capacity-building strategies
- Develop strategies and resources
- Organize, update web-site, online data-base
- Contract evaluation expert consultants
- Incorporate feedback
- Organize ADFL critique procedures
- Identify field-test sites



Objective 2: Development of strategies and resources for capacity-building

- ✓ Focused response to priority capacity-building needs
- ✓ Production of evaluation models, templates, workshops, tools, other resources
- ✓ Revised resources and strategies for dissemination and deployment



College FL Constituents

- **ADFL Conference Participants** (critique resources & strategies)
- **Language program evaluation experts** (review needs analysis findings, critique resources & strategies)
- **Field-test program sites** (commit. negotiate participation)



PHASE III

Project Personnel

- Introduce strategies & resources, processes at 5 field-test sites
- Manage field-test processes
- Collect data from participants on implementation and utility
- Revise resources & strategies, update web-site
- Summarize project findings, disseminate, publish, present

Objective 3: Field-test, revise, demonstrate utility of resources & strategies

- ✓ Model use of resources for meeting evaluation needs in real programs
- ✓ Understand, revise the effectiveness of strategies for capacity-building
- ✓ Disseminate resources and strategies, in conjunction with evidence of their utility

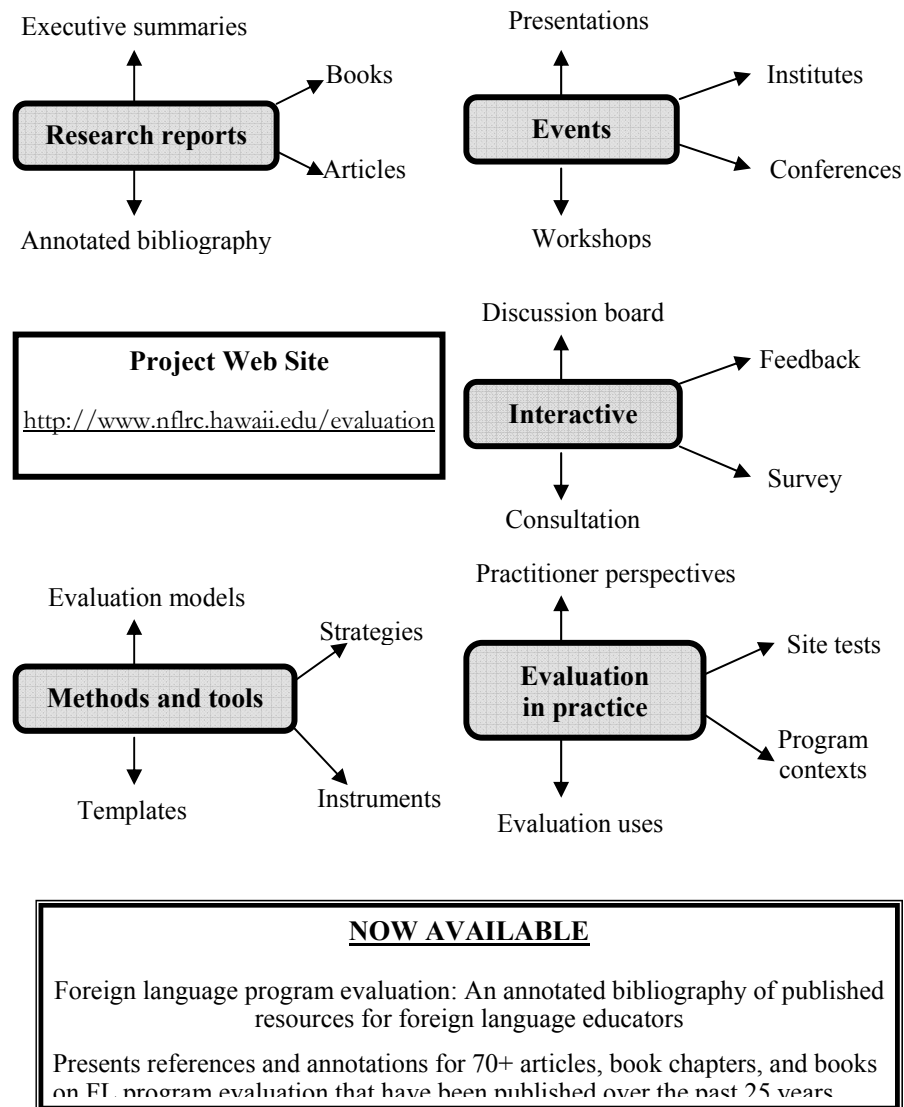
**Project phase III:
Field-Testing**
 July 2007- June 2008

College FL Constituents

- **Field-test program sites**
(implement strategies & resources; critique strengths & weaknesses; provide feedback on utility & improvements needed; engage in program evaluation)
- **College FL audiences**
(use project outcomes)

V. Resources

The project will produce and disseminate a variety of resources to help build and maintain program evaluation capacity. The project web site serves as a clearinghouse for resources and as the main point of interaction between project personnel and constituents.



VI. Sustained commitment: Related initiatives at the University of Hawaii

Because we seek to effect long-term improvements in the use and usefulness of program evaluation, we have made additional commitments to sustaining research, development, and dissemination related to evaluation over the foreseeable future.

For example, the following are some of the efforts we are pursuing at UH:

Practitioner education:

The UH SLS Department is offering a new Master's degree with specialization in "Language Assessment, Measurement, and Program Evaluation" (see <http://www.hawaii.edu/sls/lampe>).

Professional development:

The UH National Foreign Language Resource Center intends to host a two-week summer workshop in 2007 on "Program Evaluation for College Foreign Language Educators" (see <http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu>).

Outreach:

The UH Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project and the UH NFLRC will host a 2007 summer seminar of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (see <http://www.adfl.org>), including a special session on program evaluation.

Research and dissemination:

Pending funding, the UH NFLRC will support additional research on effective practices in FL program evaluation, as well as their dissemination in the form of web-based resources, books, and workshops, through 2011.

VII. An invitation to participate!

You can help us to maximize the accuracy, utility, and impact of this project in service to the US college FL community. We invite you to participate in the following ways:

1. Let us hear your ideas about program evaluation, either in the group discussion session at ACTFL or by submitting comments at any time via the project web site (<http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation>)
2. Raise awareness among your colleagues about program evaluation, and about this project, and encourage them to visit our web site to find out more (and to participate!)
3. Respond to the nation-wide survey in spring 2006, and encourage others to do so.
4. Join us at future presentations, workshops, institutes, and conferences, and help us to create a community of professional FL educators who can engage with the potentials and pitfalls of program evaluation.
5. Take advantage of the resources that are being produced and disseminated via this project.





Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Department of Second Language Studies
1890 East-West Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96822

<http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation>

jnorris@hawaii.edu

Copyright © 2005 John M. Norris & Yukiko Watanabe