

Notes from Foreign Languages Discipline Workgroup Meeting #1 July 30, 2007

Hillary Fuhrman welcomed everyone and introduced Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) staff present. Participants introduced themselves. Ms. Fuhrman proceeded with her PowerPoint presentation and presented the goals for the meeting following the slide entitled "Today's Goals."

Today's Goals

Particular attention was paid to:

- 1) The context of the current discussion on curriculum alignment.
- 2) The urgent need for this work to be done:
 - a. Need to address the tremendous gap between K-12 and higher education
 - b. 35% - 40% of postsecondary students in Missouri need remedial work
 - c. Curriculum alignment is an integral part of any strategy to increase student success in postsecondary education.
- 3) The overall vision for these meetings is for faculty (the experts) to communicate how to reduce this percentage.
- 4) The importance of collective decision-making for this process

It was emphasized that those present were in charge as they were the experts in their field. The MDHE staff was simply there as facilitators to help the group focus and define their next steps. One of the necessary outcomes for this meeting was the selection of two representatives to serve on a Steering Committee. One participant wondered if the foreign language standards in the Show Me Standards could be resurrected, in order to more forcefully emphasize foreign language as an important freestanding discipline. It was noted that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) did not have a foreign language representative. Therefore, they were eager to align with whatever standards were decided on here, and that the Show Me Standards could be an option. Other national and international standards / initiatives which might inform the work of the group might include the work of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT), or leading European initiatives. In addition, "critical languages" were also incorporated into the Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants, which predominantly fund the study of mathematics, engineering, technology, and science (METS).

Several other good reasons for aligning with other available national and international standards were discussed. These included

- 1) The needs of students studying abroad.
- 2) The benefits of aligning with European hiring practices that are based on these standards.
- 3) The benefits of Missouri employers having a more reliable standard for employment.
- 4) The benefits of having a unified standard across the academic and economic sectors that is aligned with European standards.

National Curriculum Alignment

“Curriculum Alignment” is a “nebulous phrase” that is played out across two areas:

- 1) Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment
- 2) Postsecondary Course Alignment

Resources were passed around for those present to look at and discuss later. (See Resources Handout)

“Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment” is of particular concern as the expectations between secondary and postsecondary educators are so vastly different. Secondary curricula do not necessarily lead to postsecondary success, even though 90% of students profess interest in continuing on to postsecondary education. The American Diploma Project was mentioned. Those present agreed that it would be wonderful if Missouri became an American Diploma state as this would better prepare students for postsecondary education.

Assessment was described as being a gatekeeper between secondary and postsecondary education. MODEC and placement tests were discussed as examples. The wide range of scores that were acceptable by various postsecondary institutions made preparation for these tests problematic. Students do not currently have a clear message as to what they need to do to prepare for college.

The discussion was turned towards concerns with “Postsecondary Course Alignment”. Paramount concerns were:

- 1) Differences between course numberings and standards
- 2) Differences between institutional missions, goals, and related standards

Resources aimed at correcting these differences were passed around. These included examples of state initiatives from Colorado and Illinois as well as The American Mathematics Association of Two Year Colleges (AMATYC). Some of the better state-level alignment work involves course competencies, outcomes, and contents. Much of this work has been mandated by state law. In Missouri, the Department of Economic Development has been working hand-in-hand with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and MDHE to maximize the value of student learning to insure the future of the state’s economy. It was mentioned that the State Board of Education revised standards last year which led to the coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE) revising the 42 hour General Education Block.

National Context/Drivers

On a national level, much of curriculum alignment has been driven by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Spellings Report “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education.” Concern was raised that NCLB does not emphasize enough the skills that a student needs to have to be prepared for life after high school.

Concerns were raised regarding the assessment of dual-credit programs. Those present were reminded that the work they did with curriculum alignment would be able to

influence this. It was also brought up that DESE is moving towards unit record data. This move will enable them to gain a much clearer picture of how dual-credit works for students.

It was reiterated that the work of those present today could help develop solutions to dual-credit concerns. The standards that these discipline groups develop will become mandated by law, thus ensuring better supervision and assessment of dual-credit programs. The Committee on Transfer and Articulation (COTA – a subgroup of the CBHE) is also interested in developing and enforcing dual-credit standards

The Spellings Report has promised that it is not another NCLB for higher education. Instead, it is focused on increasing accountability, affordability, and accessibility to postsecondary education. In order to do this, the Higher Learning Commission has been working on accreditation and assessment issues. They are particularly concerned with assessing student learning outcomes and discerning the real value of what students actually learn.

Historical Curriculum Alignment in Missouri

In efforts to improve on what has been done in the past, we need to look at what has already been done. The Missouri K-16 Coalition was formed in the mid-90s to coordinate alignment from secondary to postsecondary education. It was driven by administrators and was not inclusive of faculty involvement or knowledge.

In 2005, a General Education Policy and Matrix were developed. As part of this, credit transfer guidelines were created to facilitate transfer among Missouri higher education institutions. This project was again primarily administrator-driven. The results were very broad and ignored significant course differences, creating many problems. The inclusion of faculty (discipline experts) at these curriculum alignment meetings is designed to remedy these issues.

DESE has been revising Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) from 2000 through the present because of NCLB. They are now leaning more towards end of course evaluations (or Course Level Expectations, CLEs) that would potentially compose anywhere from 10-20% of a student's grade. These evaluations would replace the MAP in high school grades. They need to roll out the first of these exams by the 08-09 school year. The current MAP tests have been created primarily with input from secondary educators, with less input from persons in higher education. Discussion ensued regarding the impact these exams could potentially have on curriculum. Concerns were also raised about the impact these exams would have on perceptions regarding college readiness. It was mentioned that since no CLEs in the foreign languages have been created yet, the faculty involved with curriculum alignment have a unique opportunity to influence future exams in this area.

MoDEC entry level competencies were also mentioned. Those present were reminded of the importance of faculty involvement with whatever competencies/assessments are created next. DESE's "Grade and Course Level Expectations" were also referenced. It

was reiterated that all students that graduate from high school should have at least the same level of general competencies – whether they plan on going on to postsecondary education or into the workforce. The Department of Economic Development has also been pushing for this as the vast majority of jobs in the state are on their way to becoming knowledge-based. This shift in the economic sector means that for state citizens to be employed, they will need to have the same competencies as their peers who continue into postsecondary education. It is becoming increasingly difficult for those without some sort of higher education to be able to find decent jobs.

Those present realized a great need to collaborate with high school faculty. It was mentioned that adjunct professors were typically high school teachers as well and would be good liaisons between secondary and postsecondary educators. While issues of pride often get in the way, participants were encouraged that they could begin collaborations informally by getting together to grade papers in a relaxed environment. It was mentioned that Foreign Language Association of Missouri (FLAM) meetings were mostly populated by high school faculty. Participants realized that FLAM meetings would be a good forum to begin collaborations – by attending more meetings and perhaps even presenting some of the work done with this curriculum alignment project.

Current Missouri Drivers

Another resource for the current discussion on curriculum alignment is the Math, Engineering, Technology, and Sciences Coalition, or the “Missouri METS Coalition”. This coalition is concerned with the future of Missouri’s economic development. A summit last year included leaders in the business world who delivered recommendations to Governor Blunt to attract more resources to the state. These recommendations focused on the need to improve curriculum alignment across the board in these subjects and led to Senate Bill 580 and the creation of the P-20 Council. This council involves the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE), the Coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Department of Economic Development (DED). DESE has made a particular commitment to align with MDHE. The work that will be done in these meetings will inform the work that DESE does.

The recently passed Senate Bill (SB) 389 is the catalyst that drives this specific project on curriculum alignment. Section 173.005 states that

*The coordinating board shall establish guidelines to promote and
58 facilitate the transfer of students between institutions of higher education within
59 the state and shall ensure that as of the 2008-2009 academic year, in
60 order to receive increases in state appropriations, all approved public
61 two- and four-year public institutions shall work with the commissioner
62 of higher education to establish agreed-upon competencies for all
63 entry-level collegiate courses in English, mathematics, foreign
64 language, sciences, and social sciences associated with an institution's
65 general education core and that the coordinating board shall establish
66 policies and procedures to ensure such courses are accepted in transfer*

*67 among public institutions and treated as equivalent to similar courses
68 at the receiving institutions. The department of elementary and
69 secondary education shall align such competencies with the
70 assessments found in section 160.518, RSMo, and successor assessments;*

Of particular concern is the need for alignment between DESE and MDHE. At this time, 35% of students in Missouri higher education have to take remedial courses. This is cause for significant concern. These courses do not offer college credit and cost the state significant amounts of money. Those who must take these courses have a far lower chance of ever completing an undergraduate degree. Only 17% of students that require remedial course work ever complete a bachelor's degree. Of course, these statistics vary by the selectivity of an institution. For example, at a highly selective institution, students who would typically be placed in a remedial course are offered other solutions, such as tutoring, that are not tracked in the same way. There is no data on how many of the 35% are first-time, full-time traditional students or how many are non-traditional students who may have been out of an educational setting for any number of years. There is growing concern surrounding the cost of remedial postsecondary courses. Those who take such courses are much more likely to drop out before a degree is obtained, further draining state resources.

A concern mentioned by some faculty is the removal of foreign languages from general education and degree requirements. A dangerous trend at some institutions is the creation of a B.S. degree that is essentially a B.A. degree without the foreign language requirements. As many students are not exposed to foreign languages in high school (it is not an integral part of the CBHE-Recommended High School Core Curriculum), postsecondary education is their last chance for any sort of organized exposure to a foreign language. Participants stressed the value of foreign language in strengthening critical thinking and decreasing remedial enrollments in other courses. Participants stated that it was time to re-propose that foreign language become a general education requirement again. Participants noted that if they tied the need for foreign language exposure to national reports and the appropriations available per SB 389, that people would be much more likely to move to institute such recommendations.

Curriculum Alignment Organizational Structure

Senate Bill 389 mandated the creation of faculty-based discipline workgroups covering mathematics, sciences, English, social sciences, and foreign languages. After these faculty-based workgroups have met and determined the scope of the work to be done, two members from each workgroup will become a part of an over-arching steering committee. This steering committee will be composed of faculty members, administrators, and MDHE staff. While the official charge of this steering committee has not yet been developed, one of their primary goals will be to coordinate the efforts of the various discipline workgroups and to compile documents and recommendations for the MDHE Commissioner to present to the CBHE. The work of the discipline workgroups and the steering committee will not be tied to a concrete timeline until a better understanding of the scope of the work to be done is gained.

Vision

One of the key purposes of this meeting is for the faculty to tell the MDHE what their vision is. What is it that faculty would like the MDHE to “charge you with” (to give you a political mandate for)? The vision of the MDHE for these meetings is to

- 1) smooth transitions from secondary into postsecondary education (lower remediation rates) and
- 2) smooth transitions between higher education institutions for those who do not finish the 42 hour general education block or those who go through transfer “swirl” or concurrent enrollment. This includes transfer of appropriate knowledge as well as of course credit.

The decision of what course(s) to include as “entry-level” for a typical college freshman is up to participants in these discipline workgroups, particularly the knowledgeable faculty, to decide. Perhaps the first four semesters of a foreign language should be considered as they are all potential entry points.

At this point, the workgroup discussed what curriculum alignment is and is not:

Curriculum alignment today is an opportunity to influence public policy. Curriculum alignment is not a road to across-the-board assessment. The goal here is to realize and to demonstrate that local autonomies can work well together, and that there is no need for a statewide blanket assessment.

Much of the information that state legislators receive is anecdotal and may not be in tune with what is going on at state institutions of higher education. This is an opportunity for us all to make our legislators more aware of what is actually going on with the state’s higher education institutions. It is an opportunity for us to have a say in determining and creating public policy. The MDHE staff is here to serve you and to help you achieve your goals. It is up to you to decide how detailed or how broad the core competencies are.

The work being done today to align curriculum is not a hidden attempt to develop statewide assessment tools. If individual institutions wish to do this, there is room in the mandate for them to do so. The only goal today is to create a unified voice to communicate what is needed and expected of students going into postsecondary education.

It was reiterated that there is a need to continue to raise rigor and set standards and send clear messages about expectations to high schools students and DESE.

Several concerns were raised regarding exit/entry-level competencies. Some participants wanted students to have a more solid grasp of the mechanics of the English language before entering a foreign language course. Others insisted that teaching foreign languages was a significant aid to the learning of the English language. Participants also expressed concern that aligning curriculum at a single institution was difficult and wondered how it could be accomplished on a state-wide level. It was reiterated that the

mandates of law in SB 389 could be used as handles to facilitate cooperation among institutions, but that key to this process would be including all institutions in the process and being open to feedback and comment at the initiative moved forward.

The workgroup broke for a working lunch during which members discussed the direction of the workgroup. After lunch, discussion resumed work on entry-level and exit-level competencies.

Many were concerned that just because a student was college-eligible (i.e. had graduated from high school) that did not mean that they were college-prepared. Participants were reminded that a major reason for these meetings was to help resolve this issue.

A significant problem in foreign language alignment among institutions is credit hour discrepancies among courses, as well as the need to place students in “entry-level” coursework who may have had varying levels of exposure to foreign language at the secondary level. A possible solution involved creating testable competencies that are not related to credit hours. These competencies could be tested via placement exams and/or interviews. One suggestion was the use of Oral Proficiencies Exams and Interview (OPEI). This is used with American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Unfortunately, OPEI has several problems:

- 1) It's very expensive (\$130/student)
- 2) It's very time-consuming
- 3) Testing must be repeated periodically
- 4) One cannot test one's own students
- 5) Validity and reliability issues mean tests may have more value for student self-assessment than for placement

As a solution to these problems, the idea was brought up of creating a network for this testing among those involved with this curriculum alignment work.

Another idea that was repeatedly raised was that of mapping the first four semesters of college-level foreign language study onto the ACTFL guidelines. It was reiterated that the focus of the work needed to be on competencies and not on credit hours.

The question was raised “What competency level should be expected from completing one year of high school foreign language study”? What should be taught to future high school teachers of foreign languages? What type of professional development workshops can be promoted to make this level of competence a reality?

Unfortunately, foreign language study in high school is not a part of the required core curriculum. Additionally, many teachers at the secondary and postsecondary levels are struggling with teaching students for whom English is a second language, or who already speak a dialect of the language (i.e. “heritage speakers”). Students enter foreign language study at all levels of competency. Developing a standard of competencies, perhaps based

on ACTFL and/or European models is a potential solution. These competencies can measure reading, writing, listening, speaking, and cultural awareness.

Many agreed that the state should require that foreign languages be taught. The United States is very unusual in that students are not exposed to a foreign language until much later in life than their European counterparts.

The “gap” issue was also raised. The gap of time between when a person first takes a foreign language course and then takes a subsequent one is very important. If one does not practice a foreign language, they are prone to forget what they have learned.

The future goal for this discipline workgroup is to have competency guidelines set up for courses that students can be made aware of. This awareness will increase student’s confidence in learning a foreign language. This will also be beneficial to high school teachers as they will have a better idea of what they need to prepare their students for.

The next meeting date is 10-05-07 from 11:00AM – 3:00PM at MDHE. David Smallwood and Madeleine Kernen were chosen as the steering committee representatives. They will be reporting to the CBHE in December.

The next steps were outlined with a reminder that fluency was no longer a goal. The ability to function in another society or “language framework” is the new objective.

Dr. Kernen will be sending a link out regarding the Missouri Virtual School (French and Spanish courses). The workgroup will also target / schedule a follow-up meeting in late September or early October.

In order to define competencies for one year of high school and/or one semester of college, the following ideas were put forth:

- 1) Look at the ACTFL and European models (Madeleine will send out)
- 2) Map these onto current curricula
- 3) Bring any competencies (reading, writing, etc)
- 4) Recruit from non-romance languages (ex. Arabic, Chinese)
- 5) Determine how ACTFL can be mapped onto Arabic, Chinese, and other non-romance languages
- 6) Consider the Defense Language Institute standards
- 7) Consider DLPT cut-offs
- 8) Bring wording (initial draft) for exit competencies from
 - A) Four years of high school
 - B) Four semesters of college
- 9) Look at competencies put forth in textbooks – many have already done this work for you!

Also of importance was the preparation of a separate statement for the English discipline workgroup regarding the definition of a “college-prepared entry-level student.” Of

particular concern was the need for high school graduates to have some basic grammar skills. Although learning a foreign language can help with this, it is often easier for a student with a basic understanding of English grammar to pick up a foreign language.

All of these goals will serve to create a threshold for high schools students to meet.