Saturday July 30

1:30 – 3:15 Evaluation-topic-specific breakout sessions, facilitated by UH team and other presenters

Summary: This session provides an opportunity for individuals to meet and discuss evaluation issues specific to their programs and interests, topics to be determined based on a survey of attendees’ interests, targeting 4 main topics. Facilitators will provide a short overarching commentary on the particular topic, and each group will plan to report back.

Breakout session discussion questions

1. Are there any good examples of practice related to this topic that should be shared?
2. What are the key challenges associated with this particular topic, in Middle East (ME) Language Programs?
3. Which strategies might be pursued by ME language educators in responding to the challenges associated with this topic? How can we make the most of the evaluation in ME Language Programs?

Breakout session discussion topics

1. What are the alternatives for collecting data in language programs? Key methods and ethics for empirical evaluation practice.

Overview: John McE. Davis

We’ve seen a few data collection methods mentioned so far. The workshop on surveys, obviously, is an example, and a number of other methods alternatives were mentioned briefly there. Clearly, there are a lot of techniques available, beyond just putting out a survey or giving a test.

One of the points made in the survey workshop is that choices about methods should ideally come after a process of determining what people want to know about in their programs and how they want to use evaluation information, as well as a systematic way of selecting tools that will most optimally tell people what they want to know and allow particular uses of information. Instead, a common occurrence is thinking about evaluation in terms of methods first, before people are clear about use and what they want to know. So perhaps this is something to think about after today.

Some additional challenges with data collection methods—to name a few—include (a) required expertise and training for particular data collection tools is often missing; (b) needed resources to use particular tools, (c) attitudes toward specific tools—that is, stakeholders’ (sometimes differing) ideas about the ‘trustworthiness’ of a given tool for a given use; (d) needed expertise and resources for data-management.
The other topic to discuss are the ethical issues associated with the implementation of certain
evaluation data collection methods. For example, when people are supplying personal information,
opinions, attitudes, etc., how might this be a risky endeavor for them and what can be done to
protect participants from misuse of that information. Likewise, how do we safeguard against the
misuse of data generally (e.g., low standardized assessment scores associated with particular
instructors) such that data collection is not a threatening and potentially harmful activity?

Given these ideas, let’s talk about your experiences with useful or meaningful or feasible data
collection in program evaluation? What tools have you used? What seems to work well? What
were some of the challenges associated with those tools? Were there any ethical issues that arose?
If so, how were they addressed?

**Major points from the discussion:**

• The primary data-collection method is surveys/questionnaires
• Smaller programs have unique challenges evaluation uses of survey, primarily deriving
  from lacking student information
  o Programs in institutions without ME language majors have difficulty keeping
    student contact and demographic information
  o For example, there is no central database/list of student email addresses; the number
    of students taking particular languages courses is hard to know, as is the number of
    graduates (with a minor or language requirement in a ME language).
• Challenge: Added work created by evaluation/assessment activity
  o With small programs, much of the evaluation/assessment burden falls on a single
    individual
  o Few resources are available for helping with the added tasks associated with
    evaluation/assessment work
  o Response: ME language educators should exhaustively research available
    institutional support dedicated to evaluation/assessment work. Institutions provide
    funding and other forms of support, and often people simply don’t know about it.
• Ethical considerations include anonymity of respondents (students, primarily), in particular:
  o Respondents using L2s
  o Small numbers of respondents (redressed by waiting for larger numbers of
    respondents to accumulate to create more anonymity)
• Challenge: A perception exists that language educators need methodological expertise in
  order to employ particular methods, specifically statistical knowledge to be able to
  implement surveys and use survey information
  o Response: Language program professionals need training in evaluation methods,
    and should also share experiences about methods and useful practices
• Challenge: General evaluation issues (not strictly having to do with methods) include
  getting graduate student graduate assistants(GAs)/TAs to be involved in evaluation and to
  contribute productively (i.e., generating “buy-in” for these individuals)
  o Response: Find ways to provide incentives for graduate students to be involved in
    evaluation work. For example:
  o Undertake evaluation projects in which GAs/TAs have a stake/invested interest
Make GAs/GTAs aware of the professional benefits of assessment/evaluation experience for their future academic careers

Encourage GAs/GTAs to publish on assessment/evaluation topics

- Certain constituencies in attendance—representing overseas language programs, for example—have special needs with regard to evaluation generally.
- In a particular instance (in Jordan), the language program had a working culture in which communication between stakeholders (i.e., students and staff) worked well, but was looking for methodological advice (and advice on evaluation approaches, generally) from programs in the U.S. to transport back home.

2. How can we develop an ‘evaluation culture’ in our programs? Encouraging participation, buy-in, and a willingness to change.

**Overview: Yukiko Watanabe**

Throughout the sessions so far, we have repeatedly heard from presenters that individual and organizational buy-in and commitment to roles for evaluation in a language program are key to success in conducting program evaluation that leads to meaningful transformation. Ultimately, what we may hope to achieve—and certainly what we are being asked to achieve through accreditation mandates—is the development of a joint commitment within our programs and organizations towards the regular use of evaluation and programmatic thinking as an accepted way of doing language education. Of course, that kind of ‘evaluation culture’ may still be a long ways off for many of our colleagues, and for higher education in general. At the same time, there may be some ways to take steps towards the kind of participation, buy-in, and willingness to act on evaluation that we think underlie useful evaluation cultures.

This discussion group will focus on building evaluation culture. Let's first define what we mean by evaluation culture as a starter. What is evaluation culture to you?

Evaluation culture is...

- individual and organizational attitudes, perceptions/understanding, value, and beliefs towards evaluation.
- openness to change/transformation.

What are some of the challenges you are facing (or you will be facing) in building evaluation culture in your department and what are some of the strategies that worked (or you think will work) to overcome such challenges? Before we start, let me first give you some of the challenges and strategies that I observed from college foreign language programs I work with.

(a) **Negative perceptions about evaluation, no buy-in**

→ Instead of pushing for evaluation, evaluation facilitator first acknowledged where faculty are coming from and what their concerns are; aired out concerns and untangled misunderstandings.

→ Evaluation facilitator and the Department chair acknowledged that culture change takes time and effort; take time to talk to individuals and allocate meeting time for talking about evaluation.
(b) No evaluation expertise and understanding
The Department chair advocated for evaluation and proactively brought external expert for consultation and faculty development on evaluation, in order to build understanding of evaluation among faculty. This resulted in creating a common understanding (speak the same language to describe evaluation).

(c) No reward, just added work
The Department chair recognized faculty achievement/effort and evaluation progress in order to sustain evaluation work.

The challenges you face in building a organizational culture are likely to be influenced by the working relationship in your program, leadership, and external institutional culture, etc. So strategies need to be adapted to your own institutional and organizational culture.

What are your experiences trying to build evaluation culture in your department/program? What are the challenges you faced and what are some of the strategies you found to work well in overcoming those challenges?

Major points from the discussion:

- Perceived negative aspects of evaluation/assessment: it is a threatening process, coming from outside of programs (a “conspiracy” against local program stakeholders), with unclear purposes
- An initial issue: How to introduce evaluation into a program
  - Initially involves changing attitudes
  - Creating time and space to discuss evaluation ideas
  - Building understanding of evaluation ideas, especially faculty
  - Communicating a key notion that evaluation should be about “reflection”
- Practical steps to integrate evaluation into program processes include:
  - Getting key stakeholders involved, particularly part-time faculty
  - Coordination of some kind; someone must bring diverse (and disaffected) stakeholders into evaluation discussions and must convince people that evaluation is something that works in their interest (ideally it should work for them, not against them)
- Where evaluation culture is absent, stakeholders need tools to understand the program, its components and functioning (via focus groups, most optimally). Ways to do this include:
  - Undertaking needs analysis
  - Developing curricular maps and logic model-type representations of the program in order to see the “big picture” of the program at all programmatic levels
  - Participation from stakeholders in creating these is key
- How do ME educators make evaluation a routine part of programs?
  - Be aware of existing program/department working culture and in-place assessment systems
  - Persuade people to be involved; generate buy-in
Try to get non-tenure track program stakeholders on board (convince them to be team players; remind them evaluation is part of their professional duty; provide incentives:
- Monetary support to engage in extra work (assessment and evaluation)
- Conduct regular meetings on assessment
- Give chair recognition of their work
- Build professional profile by publishing assessment work

Collaborate with other language programs and learn from others’ experiences

Be mindful of wider existing institutional cultures, and tailor evaluation activities accordingly

Realize that local evaluation at department/program levels can impact the wider institution as well (toward useful practice)

- Challenge: streamlining and making sense of large amounts of data. Difficult to synthesize data and get an overall picture to push the department in a certain direction.
  - Response: Invite an external review team to analyze data and provide feedback. Ensure external reviewers understand what is required of them and are able to do the required work.

- Challenge: No intent to “close the loop” (i.e., use evaluation/assessment information) by the upper administration. No support for evaluation from upper admin.
  - Response: Change/educate upper administration from the bottom up; get together with other language departments to advocate for monetary support for evaluation from upper admin.

- Challenge: Faculty perceives assessment and evaluation as imposition and compliance
  - Response:
    - Leadership is key; department chair needs to make evaluation/assessment a priority and a regular topic in department meetings
    - Start with small, feasible tasks; make positive changes
    - Talk individually to faculty; some groundwork is needed; talk about what has been learned from the MESA Western Consortium workshop

- Challenge: Non-use of course evaluations to improve teaching
  - Response:
    - Unless there is buy-in for faculty development, course evaluation is a waste of time and resources
    - Clarify the purpose of the course evaluation—personnel review versus teaching and course improvement
    - Where a culture of teaching is supported by the upper administration, faculty take course evaluation seriously. Also, support is available for instructors to use course evaluation results as part of faculty development and mentoring (e.g., semester/annual meeting with the chair to review the course evaluation and get constructive feedback).

- Challenge: lacking tools; insufficient resources
  - Response: Get together with other ME language programs to share resources and help evaluate each other’s program.
3. What is the best way to get started with program evaluation? Strategies for initiating feasible, useful evaluation projects.

Overview: Bonnie Sylwester

Obviously, there are a lot of different aspects of programs that might call for evaluation, a lot of reasons to do it, and a lot of methods for collecting evaluation data. The evaluation process as well as the results can help us learn more about our program, identify our strengths and weaknesses, improve planning and communication in our organizations, and help us demonstrate the value of our program to outsiders.

However, there are also a lot of challenges that we face with regard to getting evaluation practice started. Some of the typical challenges in getting evaluation off the ground have been: (a) garnering support for evaluation among faculty, overcoming fear or negative associations with evaluation, and expanding understandings of what evaluation; (b) determining who should be involved and ensuring that key decision-makers and stakeholders are involved, supportive, and committed; (c) narrowing the focus of the evaluation, establishing the purpose of the evaluation, and developing and agreeing on useful and feasible evaluation questions; and (d) securing the necessary resources to carry-out the evaluation.

If we consider all of these issues, the idea of starting evaluation seems overwhelming, yet it’s not impossible. So, how do we get started? What are some practical strategies for “jump-starting” the practice of evaluation within our MELPs and overcoming these challenges?

- Sometimes the best thing might be to just get something small going by way of demonstrating that evaluation can be feasible and useful.

- Another strategy might be to look for a new initiative that your program is starting and make sure that evaluation is incorporated into all stages of the new initiative from the first day of planning

- We can also encourage faculty members to approach evaluation as a scholarly activity and treat it as a kind of curriculum inquiry that will lead to new knowledge about foreign language programs that can be published and presented.

- Finally, in some cases there may be university resources that you can make use of. If the university is encouraging evaluation, there may be helpful resources, assistance, and support for starting an evaluation project.

The nature of the challenges you face for “jump starting” evaluation, will vary from context to context and will also depend on your role within the program, but these are some ideas which can help you get started. How about your experiences initiating program evaluation activities? What strategies have you found helpful in overcoming challenges and getting useful and feasible evaluation projects started?

Major points from the discussion:
• Determine the **purpose** of evaluation/assessment efforts
  - Have stakeholders gauge the strengths and weaknesses of different purposes
• Develop an overall future vision for the program
• Think about how to report program value to the wider institution
• Have stakeholders identify needed information to get evaluation going
• Engage and communicate with relevant stakeholders during evaluation start-up/planning and convince them that evaluation is worthwhile/in their interest. Some strategies to this end:
  - Share success/failure stories with peer programs/departments
  - Try to have stakeholders see mandated evaluation (e.g., required outcomes assessment) as an opportunity to start more internally driven evaluation/assessment activity
  - Involve students in evaluation/assessment start-up activities
  - Inform people about follow-up/actions taken as a result of evaluation/assessment (i.e., how the data people have provided is used)
• Getting evaluation/assessment started requires resources/support:
  - Department of Education and NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities)? Federal grants
  - Seek out assistance from local assessment offices and/or teaching support (“centers for teaching excellence”)
  - Seek statistical expertise/knowledge
  - Be sure to look into all avenues of institutional support. Example: incentives such as course-buy outs exist (to provide time for evaluation/assessment work), but sometime people don’t know about these opportunities
  - Since evaluation requires a time commitment from individuals, use incentives such as assessment-related publications to help motivate people to do evaluation work.

4. **How should outcomes assessment help our programs? Stating and assessing outcomes with an eye towards use and impact.**

*Overview: John Norris, Martha Schulte-Nafeh*

Obviously, as we’ve heard already in several of the sessions, this is perhaps the major kind of mandated evaluation activity for college language programs, centers, etc.

I think there are a lot of ways in which outcomes assessment can help our programs, among them: (a) encouraging us, faculty and others, to think and communicate about curriculum, instruction, and assessment in a holistic way; (b) requires development of at least some consensus regarding the intended value or benefits of our programs; (c) helps us to express the same to outside audiences, like prospective students, funders, the institution; (d) can expose gaps in our own thinking and program design that are in need of attention; (e) provides data regarding how well we are doing, where we might need to make improvements, and so on.

It is also true that outcomes assessment can sometimes be a challenge, if not a downright negative experience, especially when: (a) only done to get it done (i.e., perfunctorily, not taken seriously); (b) left up to the chair or an individual, rather than undertaken at least in part by the full program;
(c) based on outside, easily purchased or borrowed assessments that may not really have much to do with the actual values or intended learning goals of our programs and students; and (d) not used in any specific way (i.e., just data collection but without any next steps conceived for putting the data to some kind of use).

A few strategies that we have seen lead to positive changes through outcomes assessment include: (a) keeping it feasible by focusing on small steps, individual questions, or particularly important/uncertain outcomes one at a time (rather than trying to undertake the ongoing assessment of all possible outcomes all the time; (b) making it part of regular program planning, meetings, review, and other group activities, so that key stakeholders have a voice and participate in the process; (c) thinking in the first instance about what exactly we will try to accomplish by carrying out an assessment project (asking ourselves what we want/need to do with a particular kind of assessment data—if we cannot answer that question, it is probably not the right time to do assessment); and (d) making it a scholarly activity by encouraging individuals and/or teams to treat it as a kind of curriculum inquiry via which new knowledge about FL education (or project design, or similar) can be developed, presented, and published (i.e., leading to residual value for academics).

So, those are just a few introductory thoughts…How about your experiences with outcomes assessment?

**Major points from the discussion:**

- Language educators need to re-think how (and which) outcomes assessment tools can be used for ME language education given current ME language program assessment needs.
- Information and training is needed on how to use assessment tools most productively toward meeting internal and external evaluation demands.
- Initial issues with outcomes assessment include:
  - Clarity of terminology—different meaning for the terms “assessment” exist and should be clarified
  - Student learning outcomes are specific tools that are not understood well: how particularly are they to be phrased; what is their use; when should they be assessed?
  - Perceptions persist about the use of grades as an assessment tool; people wonder if grades are sufficient indicators of student performance. More training and knowledge needs to be imported into FL education about broader changes in undergraduate learning and assessment generally
- Useful tools that might be used by ME language programs include:
  - Portfolios (e.g., lingua folio is a possibility)
  - ME-specific assessment standards/competencies (the ACTFL standards are a possibility)
  - New ME program assessment standards may be needed; if so, however, these need to be flexible, something transferable across programs
  - Issues: who will devise these standards? Should be experienced leaders in the ME community, but who?