I. John Norris – Introduction

John Norris provided a general introduction to the issue of evaluating outcomes for Middle Eastern Language Programs, addressing the following topics and questions:

1. *Taking our programs seriously: From outcomes to indicators*

   - Thinking beyond testing and measurement to behaviors, reactions, opinions, and other observable phenomena that will provide us with meaningful data about the program or outcomes

2. *What are some of the possibilities for assessing and otherwise collecting data on challenging outcomes?*

   - Direct and indirect methods for gathering data on outcomes and aspects of programs that are usually challenging to evaluate

3. *How do we make use of findings about outcomes?*

   - Thinking about how the data we collect will be used, who will see it, and how that may affect the data collection methods we choose

(For a detailed summary of this introduction, see the corresponding handout: [http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation/files/Roundtable_discussion2.pdf](http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation/files/Roundtable_discussion2.pdf))
II. Panelists - Concrete Examples Of Collecting Data On Challenging Outcomes And Program Areas

Panelists provided specific examples of methods they used to gather data on diverse outcomes or program elements that usually present challenges for evaluation.

Martha Schulte-Nafeh

General program improvement - Focusing the evaluation

When approaching an evaluation we often begin with general, and quite vague, questions such as “How are students responding to the class/program?” These questions are usually too broad to provide us with any useful information by themselves. One way to focus the evaluation and zero in on more specific questions is to conduct a small-scale, preliminary survey eliciting feedback from students in the form of open-ended responses to the general questions. After analyzing students’ responses for recurring themes, more specific items about certain themes or program features and outcomes can be developed. Then, a new survey with the more closed-response items can be administered to a larger student population to gather specific information on the program and outcomes.

Esther Raizen

Interaction and conversation skills

Group oral exams are one means of getting at outcomes that are usually difficult to evaluate, such as interaction or other conversation skills. In a group oral exam, a group of students discuss a topic together and receive a group grade. At the same time, the instructor may also record and/or grade individual students’ participation with the use of a rubric. For example, the instructor may record the number of utterances, the number of times students initiate conversation, grade the creativity of contributions, etc.

Students’ sense of progress and achievement

Surveys can be used to get at students’ perspectives on their language learning progress and achievements. This in turn can be used to encourage classroom discussion and reflection, and to report about progress to wider audiences. For example, a brief survey asking students about their experiences with the OPI, i.e. “How did the OPI make you feel?” can be used to: (a) provide the instructors with information on students’ perceptions of their progress and performance on the OPI; (b) encourage students to reflect on their performance; (c) initiate classroom discussion on student learning, skills, and progress; and (d) demonstrate students’ sense of achievement and learning to outside audiences. Discussing survey results with the class has the added value of
demonstrating to students that the survey results are being used, motivating them to complete future surveys for the program.

Ahmet Okal

Intercultural competence and study abroad preparation

Courses designed to teach intercultural competence or prepare students for study abroad often face the challenge of evaluating outcomes. Traditional methods such as tests are often not adequate for getting at how well programs are doing at meeting these outcomes. However, there are a number of ways to elicit student feedback on the course and assess these learning outcomes both directly and indirectly.

Indirect Methods

• Individual student self-assessments: Regularly gathering feedback from students on how they are doing in the course, which aspects are working well, and where more support or assistance is needed.

• Whole class feedback on the course: Eliciting feedback from the whole class on specific aspects of the course. This can also be useful if non-traditional teaching methods (i.e., computer simulations, online learning activities) are being used. For example, the class can provide feedback on the teaching methods and compare the pros and cons of non-traditional methods with traditional methods.

• Interviews: Individual interviews with students before and after study abroad experiences to determine how well the students feel the course has prepared them for the study abroad experience.

Direct Methods

• Biographies: Students write the biography of a persona/character that they have created for the course. The biography demonstrates what they have learned about the target culture and community.

• Essay: Students write an essay comparing US culture to the target culture.

When a number of these methods are combined and data is collected over several semesters, instructors have rich data that can give them a clear picture of which aspects of intercultural competence and study abroad preparation are working well and which need improvement.