

Standard-Setting Study for the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test for Credit in French 506, 507, 312K, and 312L: Fall 2005

Introduction

Purpose

At the request of the Department of French and Italian, the Instructional Assessment and Evaluation (IAE) component of the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA) conducted a standard-setting study for the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French (Wisconsin French Test) to assist the department in re-examining the qualifying scores for student placement and the award of credit by examination for French 506, 507, 312K, and 312L. UT Austin policy requires that score ranges used as the basis for the award of credit by examination shall reflect the same standard of performance for students who receive credit by examination as for students who complete the coursework. The test was adopted by the department for use beginning in 1997 (Kelly, Fitzpatrick, Hou, & Dodd, 1997).

Course Descriptions

French (FR) 506, First-Year French I, is a five-credit beginner course in a sequence of four undergraduate introductory courses. FR 507, First-Year French II, is a five-credit second semester course, which has for a prerequisite completion of FR 506 at UT Austin with a grade of C or better. Students who earn credit-by-examination for FR 506, who take FR 506 at another college, or who take it at UT Austin more than one year earlier must enroll in FR 508K, Alternate First-Year French II. FR 604, Accelerated First-Year French covers the first two beginning French courses (506 and 507) in one semester. The second year of French language study consists of two three-credit courses, FR 312K and 312L, Second-Year FR I and II, respectively, which are required to complete a four-semester program in French. The prerequisites of FR312K are completion of FR 507, 508K, or 604 with a grade of at least C, and those of FR 312L are completion of FR 312K with a grade of at least C (French—Course Descriptions, 2006).

Method

Participants

A total of 412 undergraduate students enrolled during fall 2005 in FR 506, 507, 508K, 604, 312K, or 312L took the Wisconsin French Test at the end of the semester. Scores of 6 students were eliminated from the analysis because course letter grades were not available for them (because they were auditing the course or taking it for *credit/no-credit*). Also, scores from one section of FR 312L (nine students) were not included in the study, because the students were given incorrect instructions, resulting in their grades being significantly lower than those of the other students. Table 1 shows the number of sections and number of student participants used in the analysis.

Table 1. Numbers of Class Sections and Students

Course	Number of Sections	Number of Students
FR 506	12	140
FR 507	4	36
FR 508K	3	35
FR 604	1	11
FR 312K	10	112
FR 312L	5 ¹	63
Total	32	397

1. One of six sections of FR 312L (nine students) was not included in the study.

The data from FR 507, FR508K, and FR 604 are analyzed together to set the qualifying score for placement in FR 507.

Materials

Test Description

The Wisconsin French Test has been developed through the collaboration of faculty of the University of Wisconsin System and Wisconsin high school teachers since 1984, specifically to be used for college-level placement for the introductory sequence in French (French Placement Test, n.d.). The test battery includes the Grammar and Reading Comprehension Test, with modules for reading and grammar, and the Listening Comprehension Test (General Characteristics of the Test, 1999), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Components of the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French (General Characteristics of the Test, 1999)

	Skills tested	Format	Time allowed
Reading Module	Students' understanding of authentic French texts, including newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and short stories	Multiple choice questions with four choices each	60 minutes
Grammar Module	Students' understanding of morphological and syntactic forms, such as adjective and article usage and agreement, verb forms and uses, and pronoun forms and uses.	Multiple choice questions with four choices each	
Listening Comprehension Test	Students' ability to understand French spoken at normal speed for various purposes.	Multiple choice questions with four choices each	Approximately 30 minutes

The test is entirely in French except for the instructions. With one correct answer for each item and no penalty for guessing, a number-correct score is converted to a standard score reported on a scale of 150-850 (General Characteristics of the Test, 1999). The reported reliability for total score is above .90 (French Placement Test, n.d.).

Procedure

Examination Process

The Wisconsin French Test was administered in December, 2005, during the last week of classes to students enrolled in FR 506, 507, 508K, 604, 312K, and 312L, who were directed to register for the “French Course Exam” using the on-line test registration system. As incentive to take the exam, instructors offered students a pre-determined number of points to be added in the computation of the final grade. Students were not eligible to receive credit by examination on the basis of this administration.

The test was administered to large groups in classroom settings by UT Austin testing personnel, under the same conditions as apply for any exam taken as a basis for course credit. During the three-day testing period, 412 students of the 718 who registered sat for the examination, due in large part to inclement weather that forced cancellation of one administration, affecting 260 students, many of whom were not available for testing on the make-up date. Additional dates could not be scheduled because the week following was designated by the university for preparation for finals.

Validation Process

Concurrent validity was determined using final course grades calculated without including the points awarded as incentive to take the Wisconsin French Test. A comparison of the course grade distributions of students who did and did not take the Wisconsin French Test can be found in Appendix A. Grades were recorded using a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 = *F*, 1 = *D*, 2 = *C*, 3 = *B*, and 4 = *A*. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between course grades and scores on the Wisconsin French Test for each course. Data from FR 508K and FR 604 were merged into FR 507 data.

IAE staff prepared three tables for each course:

- The first table shows frequency distributions for course grades by test scores, as well as expected test scores for each grade and expected grades for each test score as calculated using linear regression equations.
- The second table collapses the course grades into two categories—Unsatisfactory (course grades *F* and *D*) and Satisfactory (course grades *C*, *B*, and *A*)—and shows the frequencies in these two categories by test scores.
- The third table shows the accuracy of placement that would result for each Wisconsin French Test score, by indicating the number and percentage of students whose placement would be correct, too high, and too low, as determined by the corresponding course grade.

Based on the data in these three tables, IAE staff first identified six candidates for possible qualifying scores based on six accepted guidelines (see Appendices B-E), from which IAE staff then made their final choice for recommendation.

Reliability and SEM

Testing and Evaluation Services of the University of Wisconsin report that the total test score has a reliability coefficient above .90 (French Placement Test, n.d.). The standard error of measurement (SEM) for each French course was calculated to yield another measure of reliability. The SEM indicates the amount of error to allow for when interpreting individual test results, and is derived from the reliability coefficient using the formula

$$SEM = s\sqrt{1 - r_n}$$

where s = standard deviation and r_n = reliability coefficient. .90 was used as the value of reliability coefficient.

Analyses

Summary Statistics

Descriptive statistics for each of the five French courses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Student Performance in French 506, 507/508K/604, 312K, 312L on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French

	506	507/508K/604	312K	312L
Sample Size (N)	140	82	112	63
Mean Test Score	429.11	526.06	546.50	595.86
Standard Deviation of Test Score	59.64	78.10	78.34	79.92
Minimum Test Score	167	399	380	425
Maximum Test Score	653	822	741	802
Correlation: Test Score and Course Grade (r)	0.49	0.60	0.69	0.66
Standard Error of Measurement (SEM)	18.86	24.70	24.77	25.27

Qualifying Score Determination

Summary of Qualifying Score Studies

After examining the six candidate scores for each course, IAE staff decided on one qualifying score to recommend for each course. Because the motivation for the request by the Department of French and Italian to conduct the standard-setting study was the desire to raise existing qualifying scores, IAE staff considered only candidate scores that were higher than current ones. This approach was also supported in view of the experience of the University of Wisconsin (Madison, Eau Claire, Milwaukee, and Whitewater) where the Wisconsin French Test has been developed, whose qualifying scores are generally higher than UT Austin's (see Table 4).

As qualifying scores for FR 506 and 507, IAE staff recommended candidate scores justified by guideline one (the Expected Score for students whose performance in the course was just minimally satisfactory), because such scores have typically been used as the result of other studies and, in this study, these scores were the highest of the six candidate scores.

As qualifying scores for FR 312K and 312L, IAE staff recommended maintaining the scores currently used by the department, because both scores were higher than any of the candidate scores (see Appendices D and E).

Table 4 shows a comparison of current UT Austin qualifying score recommendations resulting from the 1997 study and those from the present study, as well as the scores used for the undergraduate French programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison¹ (Placement in Foreign Language Courses, 2004), the University of Wisconsin-Eau Clair (Foreign Language Placement, n.d.), the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (05x placement table, n.d.), and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (Foreign Language, 2005). The UW-Madison, Eau Clair, Milwaukee, and Whitewater scores are shown for external reference purposes only, because of differences in that institution's French courses and validation procedure.

Table 5 shows the pattern of credit-eligible scores that would result if recommendations of IAE staff were adopted. Table 6 shows a comparison of students' performances on the Wisconsin French Test from the 1997 and 2006 studies.

Table 4. Comparison of UT Austin Recommendations for Credit-Qualifying Scores on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French, 1997 and 2006, with University of Wisconsin Qualifying Scores

Course/Credit		UT Austin 1997 Study ¹	UT Austin 2006 Study	UW-Madison ²	UW-Eau Clair ²	UW-Milwaukee ²	UW-Whitewater ²
506	A	452-850	403	412	404	354	412
	B	413-451					
	C	374-412					
507	A	553-850	475	477	456	502	497
	B	498-552					
	C	443-497					
312K	A	597-850	518	572	553	586	591
	B	557-596					
	C	518-556					
312L	A	663-850	568	677	774	677	726
	B	616-662					
	C	568-615					

¹ The bold qualifying scores from the 1997 UT Austin study are the minimum scores for an award of C.

² The four-semester introductory sequence in French at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that appears to be the equivalent of FR 506, 507, 312K, and 312L at UT Austin are French 101, 102, 203, and 204 (Undergraduate French Program, n.d.). At the UM-Eau Claire, they are French 101, 102, 201, and 202, at the UM-Milwaukee, they are French 103, 104, 203, and 204, and at UM-Whitewater, they are French 141, 142, 251, and 252. The scores shown in these columns are placement scores (not credit-qualifying scores): the students who obtain the scores shown in the table or above are eligible to be placed in the next higher course.

¹ It appears that qualifying scores used at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are *not* selected based on final course grade data as in the case of UT Austin, because the Testing and Evaluation Services unit at UW-Madison does *not* recommend using final course grades in a standard-setting study. It recommends using other data such as mid-semester grades, grades on the first mid-term exam, surveys of students' satisfaction with their placement, or add-drop information to assess how well a placement works (The Proper Use of Placement Test Scores, n.d.).

Table 5. Pattern of Credit Eligibility with Qualifying Score Recommendations of IAE Staff

Score Range	506 Credit	507 Credit	312K Credit	312L Credit
402 or lower	No	No	No	No
403 - 474	Yes	No	No	No
475 - 517	Yes	Yes	No	No
518 - 567	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
568 or higher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 6. Comparison of Students' Performance on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French, 1997 and 2006

Mean Test Score (Standard Deviation) Sample Size	1997	2006
FR 506	419.0 (57.07) N = 288	429.11 (59.64) N = 140
FR 507/508K/604	506.4 ¹ (71.05) N = 318	526.06 (78.10) N = 82
FR 312K	554.5 (64.71) N = 180	546.50 (78.34) N = 112
FR 312L	615.0 (73.12) N = 105	595.86 (79.92) N = 63

1. The 1997 data for this cell are only from FR 507 students.

Impact of IAE Recommendations on Number of Students Awarded Credit

Table 7 shows the number and percent of students from the study sample who would or would not be eligible for credit by examination under the qualifying scores recommended by IAE staff.

Table 7. Credit Eligibility under Recommended Qualifying Scores

Eligibility	506	507/508K/604	312K	312L
Credit	91 65%	62 76%	74 66%	39 62%
No Credit	49 35%	20 24%	38 34%	24 38%
TOTAL	140 100%	82 100%	112 100%	63 100%

It is important that the results of the current study be considered with caution, for two reasons. Because the mean course grades of the students who took the Wisconsin French Test were substantially higher than those of the students who did not (see Appendix A), it is possible that

the results are skewed towards higher scores. In addition, the sample sizes for the current study are small, in particular for FR 507 and FR 312L. IAE staff recommend that the qualifying scores be re-examined for FR 507 and FR 312L by administering the Wisconsin French Test again in a spring semester, when the enrollments in these courses are higher.

References

05x Placement Table. (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of Enrollment Services Website:

<http://www3.uwm.edu/des/web/testing/05xplacementtable.cfm>

Foreign Language Placement. (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Academic Testing Web site:

<http://www.uwec.edu/advising/testing/flPlacement.htm>

Foreign Language. (2005). Retrieved February 15, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Student Affairs Web site:

<http://www.uwec.edu/advising/testing/flPlacement.htm>

French—Course Descriptions. (2006). Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the University of Texas at Austin, College of Liberal Arts Web site:

<http://web.austin.utexas.edu/cola/students/courses/department.cfm?dept=FR&YYS=062&crsLevel=Undergraduate>

French Placement Test. (n.d.). Retrieved January 20, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin, Testing and Evaluation Services Web site:

http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/exams/french_placement_test.htm

Kelly, H.P., Fitzpatrick, S. J., Hou, L., and Dodd, B. G. (1997). *Standard-setting study for the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in French for use in course placement and credit by examination in French 506, 507, 321K, and 312L at the University of Texas at Austin: Spring 1997.* Retrieved January 19, 2006, from The University of Texas at Austin, Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment Web site:

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/mec/publication/pdf/fulltext/RB-97-1.pdf>

General Characteristics of the Test. (1999). Retrieved January 24, 2006, from the University of Texas at Austin, Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment Website:

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/mec/cbe/frsam.html>

Placement in Foreign Language Courses. (2004). Retrieved January 20, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Language Institute Web site:

http://languageinstitute.wisc.edu/content/uw_students/placement_language_courses.htm

The Proper Use of Placement Test Scores. (n.d.). Retrieved January 20, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin, Testing and Evaluation Services Web site:

http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/exams/proper_use_of_placement_tests.htm

Undergraduate French Program. (n.d.). Retrieved January 20, 2006, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison French and Italian Web site:

<http://frit.lss.wisc.edu/frit/french/frundergrad.html>

Appendix A

Course Grade Distributions for Students Who Took the Wisconsin French Test

Course Grade	FR 506	FR 507/508K/604	FR 312K	FR 312L
<i>A</i>	34	20	31	12
<i>B</i>	66	37	50	31
<i>C</i>	25	23	23	17
<i>D</i>	13	1	7	3
<i>F</i>	2	1	1	0
Total	140	82	112	63
Mean Course Grade	2.84	2.90	2.92	2.83

Course Grade Distributions for Students Who Did Not Take the Wisconsin French Test

Course Grade	FR 506	FR 507/508K/604 ¹	FR 312K	FR 312L
<i>A</i>	17	21	34	9
<i>B</i>	34	24	40	12
<i>C</i>	37	35	31	8
<i>D</i>	7	4	9	4
<i>F</i>	15	8	9	1
Total	110	92	123	34
Mean Course Grade	2.28	2.50	2.66	2.71

1. All students in 604 took the Wisconsin French Test.

Appendix B

Scores on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in
 Relation to Student Performance in French 506: Scores Suggested by
 Six Guidelines for Use in Selecting Qualifying Scores
 Fall 2005
 N = 140

	Guideline	Test Score
1.	Expected Score for students whose performance in the course was just minimally satisfactory (i.e., students with course grades of <i>C</i>)	403
2.	Score for which the Expected Grade was just minimally satisfactory (<i>C</i>)	321
3.	Score for which percents of errors of students in each academic performance category (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory) were most nearly equal	392 or 394
4.	Score for which overall percents of errors were most nearly equal	365 or 366
5.	Score that would have cut off (held back) approximately the same number of students as were in the Unsatisfactory performance group	365
6.	Score that would have maximized overall accuracy of placement	367 or 371

Appendix C

Scores on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in
 Relation to Student Performance in French 507, 508K, 604: Scores Suggested by
 Six Guidelines for Use in Selecting Qualifying Scores
 Fall 2005
 N = 82

	Guideline	Test Score
1.	Expected Score for students whose performance in the course was just minimally satisfactory (i.e., students with course grades of <i>C</i>)	475
2.	Score for which the Expected Grade was just minimally satisfactory (<i>C</i>)	399
3.	Score for which percents of errors of students in each academic performance category (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory) were most nearly equal	436
4.	Score for which overall percents of errors were most nearly equal	412
5.	Score that would have cut off (held back) approximately the same number of students as were in the Unsatisfactory performance group	406
6.	Score that would have maximized overall accuracy of placement	399 or 412

Appendix D

Scores on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in
 Relation to Student Performance in French 312K: Scores Suggested by
 Six Guidelines for Use in Selecting Qualifying Scores
 Fall 2005
 N = 112

	Guideline	Test Score
1.	Expected Score for students whose performance in the course was just minimally satisfactory (i.e., students with course grades of <i>C</i>)	491
2.	Score for which the Expected Grade was just minimally satisfactory (<i>C</i>)	430
3.	Score for which percents of errors of students in each academic performance category (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory) were most nearly equal	483 or 484
4.	Score for which overall percents of errors were most nearly equal	431
5.	Score that would have cut off (held back) approximately the same number of students as were in the Unsatisfactory performance group	420
6.	Score that would have maximized overall accuracy of placement	402 or 409

Appendix E

Scores on the University of Wisconsin College-Level Placement Test in
 Relation to Student Performance in French 312L: Scores Suggested by
 Six Guidelines for Use in Selecting Qualifying Scores
 Fall 2005
 N =63

	Guideline	Test Score
1.	Expected Score for students whose performance in the course was just minimally satisfactory (i.e., students with course grades of C)	540
2.	Score for which the Expected Grade was just minimally satisfactory (C)	469
3.	Score for which percents of errors of students in each academic performance category (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory) were most nearly equal	503
4.	Score for which overall percents of errors were most nearly equal	473
5.	Score that would have cut off (held back) approximately the same number of students as were in the Unsatisfactory performance group	453
6.	Score that would have maximized overall accuracy of placement	425