

U.S. Air Force Academy

Integridad - Servicio - Excelencia

Validation of Proficiency Benchmarks



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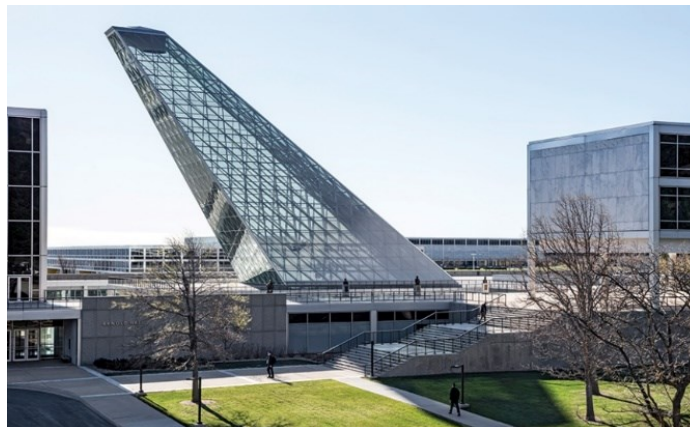
USAFA Context

- Different from civilian tertiary institutions in many ways.
- Selection Process to matriculate to USAFA.
 - 3-pronged daily student responsibilities: Academic, Military, Physical.
 - Vis-à-vis FLs: No language major; language minors in all 8 languages.
- 2 semester language requirement if not validating/placing out.
- 100 level is taught every day.
- 160 hours of instruction 100 level (Fall and Spring)
- 80 hours of instruction 200+ levels (taught every other day)
 - AP scores, prior college level courses and/or equivalents, DLPT scores, etc.



USAFA Context

- Cadets studying one or more of the 8 languages receive a minor in a language.
 - 25% of graduating class [~1000 cadets] earns a minor
- Strategic languages (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian)
- Non-strategic (French, German, Portuguese, Spanish)
- Minor consists of 5 courses at the 200 level and above.





Immersion Opportunities





Language Roadmaps to Proficiency

- New leadership > requesting that we examine our curricula and formulate language roadmaps
 - Language Roadmaps: guide for what we are trying to accomplish with our language curricula
 - What proficiency level do we want our cadets to reach after a particular sequence of courses?
 - BYU Adaptive Reading and Listening Tests
 - Whenever possible, OPI testing



The screenshot displays the ACTFL Language Connects website. At the top, there is a dark blue navigation bar with social media icons (Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Email) on the left, and links for ACTFL Central, Press, Sign In, Store, ABOUT (highlighted in orange), and Join on the right. Below this is the ACTFL Language Connects logo. A secondary dark blue navigation bar contains the following menu items: ASSESSMENT & RESEARCH (highlighted in green), JOIN & CONNECT, RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS, LEARN & GROW, OUTREACH & ADVOCACY, and CONVENTION & EXPO. The main content area features a large banner image of a man and a woman in conversation, with the text "Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)" overlaid in white. Below the banner, a breadcrumb trail reads: Home > Assessment & Research > Assessment > Postsecondary. The title "Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Description" is centered below the trail. At the bottom of the browser window, a taskbar shows several open files: "export (6).xlsx", "2021 Report.pdf", and "CSCTFL Report 2022.pdf". The system clock in the bottom right corner indicates 1:00 PM on 10/11/2022.



3 Modes of Communication



Interpersonal: Person-to-Person

- Initiate, maintain, sustain conversation (oral or written)
- Active negotiation of meaning



Interpretive: Listening & Reading

- Interpret and respond to received messages
- NO active negotiation of meaning with writer or speaker



Presentational: Speaking & Writing

- Create, revise, and practice oral or written messages
- NO direct opportunity for active negotiation

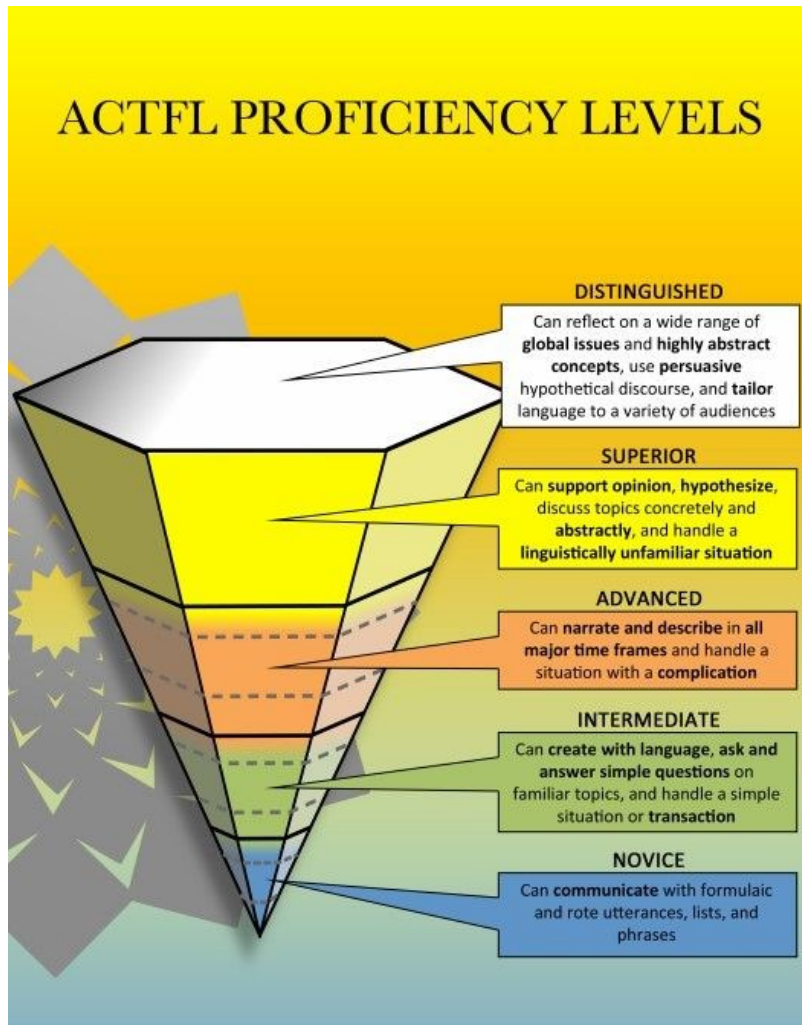


Language Roadmaps to Proficiency

- Setting benchmarks (e.g., Intermediate-Mid on ACTFL Scale)
 - Set at each yearly level/sequence, corresponding to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and ratings.
 - First year: our best “guess” vis-à-vis ACTFL proficiency guidelines.
 - Not set in stone: we have to verify these benchmarks to make sure they are accurate.



Spanish Benchmarks at End of Year



First Year

— Novice-High to Intermediate-Low

Second Year

—Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid

Third Year

—Intermediate-Mid to Intermediate-High

Graduation

—Intermediate-High to Advanced-Low



Language Roadmaps to Proficiency

- Next steps
 - Need to ascertain:
 - that we have reached our proficiency goals;
 - that our students are hitting the benchmarks indicated at the end of each level
- How to do this effectively and efficiently?
- Looking for patterns, multiyear data sets in order to adjust curricula.



Our Study

- Applied for funding from the AFOSR (AF Office of Scientific Research)
- Received sufficient funding for 31 OPI tests in 2021
- In addition, we had a few extraneous cadets who were tested by DFFL, primarily those who had studied abroad for a semester





Our Study

- Methods

- Random selection of cadets at each language level (e.g., 200, 300, 400).
- Used pools of minors, minors with study abroad → those who left the country to study and those who did not.





Our Study

Methods

Following IRB approval, the researchers randomly selected cadets in second, third, and fourth year Spanish language courses to participate in the study.

- 27 cadets volunteered to take the Oral Proficiency Interview in the USAFA language lab in April 2022.
- Data were entered into *SPSS version 28* for analysis.



Findings

Table 1

OPI Results for participants (N=16) who studied Spanish for 240 classroom hours (i.e. four semesters) at USAFA.

Proficiency Rating	Number of Participants	
Intermediate-Low	1	
Intermediate-Mid	11	
Intermediate-High	4	



Findings

Table 2

OPI Results for participants ($N=5$) who studied Spanish for 320 classroom hours (i.e. six semesters) at USAFA.

Proficiency Rating	Number of Participants	
Intermediate-Mid	1	
Intermediate-High	4	



Findings

Table 3

OPI Results for participants ($N=6$) who studied abroad for one semester at a foreign military academy in a Spanish-speaking country.

Proficiency Rating	Number of Participants	
Advanced-Low	3	
Advanced-Mid	3	

Cowabunga!



Conclusions

- ◆ Preliminary results from the OPI testing are encouraging vis-à-vis the attainment of the benchmark targets.
- ◆ Results from the present study will help to set different proficiency goals for those who study abroad for a semester.
 - At present, we do not have study abroad listed with a separate proficiency goal. More data are needed.
- ◆ Results from Study Abroad have us conducting a QUAL study about their proficiency.
- ◆ Limitation: Given the small number of participants in the study and the limited financial resources to conduct the research, the researchers call for more funding and investigation to corroborate and build on the present findings.



Future Research

- ◆ We applied for and received more funding for OPIs.
- ◆ Currently examining OPI results for
 - Arabic
 - Russian
 - Spanish
- ◆ Requested additional funds for Chinese.



USAFA is Unique





ANY
QUESTIONS?



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