The project conducted by the Department of Spanish in 2012-2014 focused on evaluating the learning that takes place in our capstone experience, the thesis, and the extent to which our majors were meeting the departmental goals. For that purpose, members of the department designed a rubric; the rubric was first applied in 2013-2014, first (in the fall) to a research paper each student chose as representative of his/her best analytical work (to date), and later (at the end of the spring semester) to his/her thesis. The results obtained have served as the basis for subsequent discussions about departmental curriculum, course content/delivery, and student evaluation mechanisms. A few changes are now being implemented.

The assessment project

The first step the department took as part of the assessment project, in the Fall of 2012, was to revisit its learning goals. After some discussion, the department came up with a refined set of goals that took into consideration the objectives and language found in the (2007) report of the MLA’s ad hoc Foreign Language Committee. The ‘new’ goals are as follows. (For full learning goals and objectives see appendix 1)

1. Students interact effectively with Spanish speakers in Spanish-speaking countries.
2. Students analyze literary and media products and/or certain language-related issues critically.
3. Students reflect on the world and on themselves through the lens of the Spanish language and cultures.
4. Students develop interpretive, critical thinking and research skills through their study of the Spanish language and of Hispanic cultural narratives.

All majors in the department write a 25-45 page-long research paper in the spring semester of their senior year. The thesis, thus, seemed the natural choice against which to evaluate the students’ performance and achievement of the goals. So the department developed a rubric to evaluate the thesis, and in particular, to probe how well students were meeting the second of the goals (analysis of literary and media products and/or certain language related issues).

However, because we did not want the project to become a form of summative assessment (i.e. evaluating learning only at the end of the process), we chose to also apply the rubric (or a slightly modified form of it) to a research paper the students identified as their best work prior to the thesis. This paper was to serve as a baseline to measure learning, and more importantly, to help the faculty and the students identify,
early on, weaknesses and strengths in their writing and their research methods (i.e., to do formative assessment). The department planned to apply the rubric to this paper and provide feedback to the students in our senior seminar, during the Fall of the senior year.

**Implementation of the assessment project**

In the fall of 2013, our majors were asked to submit what they considered to be their best analytical work to date. At the beginning of the spring, each student’s thesis director and a second member of the department applied the rubric to assess achievement of the analytical objectives in the work that the student had submitted; the thesis advisor then gave the feedback to their advisee. (The plan had been to provide the feedback some time in the fall, but that didn’t happen.)

However, before any discussions were held with the students, the members of the department conferred about the results of applying the rubric. These results made us reflect on whether we were being too ambitious in our expectations, and whether we needed to reconsider our goals and objectives. In fact, our discussion led to some modifications of the rubric. We had created the rubric with categories that evaluated the students’ ability to generate good research questions, and to identify sources, critical frameworks or theories, and the “context of the critical question”; and with categories that also assessed knowledge of the context of the topic, mechanics, writing and linguistic competence. The category that evaluated the “context of the critical question” was eliminated, and, instead, a new one was introduced that tried to capture “the overall product” (See final rubric in the appendix). Departmental members also found that many of the papers failed to incorporate or even identify a critical theory or framework, and agreed that each thesis advisor would address that ‘failure’ with their advisees.

In May, the revised rubric was applied to the senior theses, and the scores obtained in the two rubrics were compared. We found that students still did particularly poorly on the category of “identification of a critical framework”, and that a number of our students had rated no better in the thesis than in their ‘best paper’. We agreed that, while we had seen this coming, it had not been possible to ‘correct’ or undo these results in the short period of time that is one semester. We also observed that the students who had scored highest in the paper, also scored highest in their thesis (i.e. they maintained their good scores). The discussion that ensued touched on several issues that the department often found itself returning to during the assessment project: Should we offer a course focusing solely on literary/cultural theory? Should we devote more time in the senior seminar to academic writing in Spanish? Are we expecting our students to achieve too much—i.e. to develop proficiency in a second language and to simultaneously develop cultural and critical literacy? When, how, and to what extent do our curriculum and instruction create the conditions for students to learn what we expect them to know?

The department does not yet have a definite answer to some of those questions. But the assessment project has made us reflect about issues of articulation in our curriculum, and has prompted a number of changes and initiatives. I discuss those below.
Recommendations & initiatives for the future

Developing and using the rubric for student learning allowed us to be more clear about our grading criteria and procedures, and to see areas where the curriculum could be improved (primarily by strengthening certain types of theoretical content and by ‘tweaking’ our assessment methods in earlier courses).

1) Courses at the 200-level and above should incorporate readings that present and/or apply specific theoretical frameworks.

2) Members of the department will post the theoretical readings they use in their classes to the department’s Moodle page, so that others are aware of the theoretical material in different courses. At the end of 2014-2015, the department will discuss what is being covered, and assess its appropriateness, and the need for further changes.

3) Majors’ progress and trajectory should be followed more closely, so that weaker students can be identified early on, and they can receive extra help. For this purpose, we have created a module in Moodle, where members of the department can upload students’ work, as well as the faculty’s evaluation of it.

4) Members of the department will explore ways to strengthen students’ writing in the senior seminar (Span 490)

As part of our commitment to the Teagle Foundation’s goal of improving teaching and learning, I have shared our department’s experience with faculty from other departments in various ways. In year one, we created a video discussing the process and our progress thus far. We also held a lunch discussion in April 2014 to discuss students’ thesis and the results we were seeing in our assessment. And we plan to share final reports with all faculty soon, possibly at the faculty meeting. This has been a positive experience for us, because it stimulated extensive conversations about our overarching pedagogical goals along with some specific and detailed ways of measuring our effectiveness. We expect to continue our discussions and implement revisions in the coming years.
APPENDIX 1

Spanish Student Learning Goals

1. Students interact effectively with Spanish speakers in Spanish-speaking countries. They are able to:
   a. express themselves ably (both orally and in writing) on topics pertaining to every-day life (i.e. primary discourses)
   b. express themselves with relative ease (both orally and in writing) on academic topics they have studied and researched
   c. read fluently and accurately most styles and forms of the language pertinent to personal, social and certain academic discourses
d. understand accurately most styles and forms of the language pertinent to personal, social and certain academic discourses

2. Students analyze literary and media products and/or certain language-related issues critically. They:
   a. demonstrate knowledge of the socio-political, historical, and cultural contexts pertinent to text/s they study, including knowledge of the intellectual, artistic/aesthetic tradition(s) in which such texts originate
   b. be conversant with linguistic, literary and/or cultural studies theories, and use them appropriately to interrogate texts/language-related data
   c. generate and address critical questions and use textual evidence to respond to those questions

3. Students reflect on the world and on themselves through the lens of the Spanish language and cultures. They can:
   a. perceive differences in mentality, meaning, and world view between American and Spanish-speaking cultures
   b. recognize how a particular background reality is established on a daily basis through cultural subsystems
   c. understand (somewhat!) the role language (i.e Spanish) plays in shaping reality and our understanding of it

4. Students develop interpretive, critical thinking and research skills through their study of the Spanish language and of Hispanic cultural narratives. They are able to:
a. identify an area of intellectual inquiry related to language, literary, cultural and/or media studies, and determine an appropriate theory or theories to pursue their inquiry
b. use bibliographic resources and research tools effectively
c. read and critique relevant scholarship in the field
d. situate their own literary, cultural, and/or linguistic analysis in an field of scholarship
e. make an original contribution to an intellectual conversation on scholarly topic through synthesis, application, critique, and/or revision of theory
APPENDIX 2

Haverford College
Department of Spanish
Analytical Skills Rubric

Student: _______________________________________________
Date:_________________________
Pre-Senior paper? _____ or Senior Thesis? ______
Faculty reviewer: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Distinguished</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question(s)</td>
<td>Student independently identified (a) researchable, critical question(s) to pursue when doing the research</td>
<td>Student independently identified (a) researchable question(s) to pursue when doing the research</td>
<td>Student with some help identified (a) researchable question(s) to pursue when doing the research</td>
<td>Student failed to identify (a) researchable, critical question(s) to pursue when doing the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and use of sources</td>
<td>Student identified relevant primary and secondary sources and effectively incorporated them</td>
<td>Student identified relevant primary and secondary sources, and incorporated them, though not always in the most effective way</td>
<td>Student identified some relevant primary and secondary sources, and incorporated them, though not always in the most effective way</td>
<td>Student failed to identify a sufficient number of relevant primary or secondary sources, and to incorporate them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and use of a critical framework/theory</td>
<td>Student effectively identified a critical theory/framework and was able to incorporate it in the service of the critical question</td>
<td>Student with some help identified a critical theory/framework and was able to incorporate it in the service of the critical question</td>
<td>Student was provided with a critical theory/framework, that they were able to incorporate it in the service of the critical question</td>
<td>Student was provided with a critical theory/framework, that they were however not able to incorporate it in the service of the critical question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mechanics”</td>
<td>Thesis has a logical and clear overall structure</td>
<td>Thesis is mostly logically structured, with a clear organization</td>
<td>Thesis is unevenly organized, with parts that are logical and easy to follow, and others poorly structured</td>
<td>Thesis is poorly organized, and difficult to follow</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Expression (/language?)</td>
<td>Student demonstrates strong ability to express complex ideas and argue convincingly in Spanish</td>
<td>Student demonstrates ability to express complex ideas in Spanish, and requires only minor help in specific passages</td>
<td>Student has some difficulty expressing complex ideas in Spanish, and making their points, and work requires consistent editing</td>
<td>Student has great difficulty writing argumentatively, and expressing complex ideas in Spanish, and work remains difficult to follow after heavy faculty editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall product</td>
<td>Thesis is overall very original, informative and interesting. The product of a scholar in the making</td>
<td>Thesis is overall informative and contributes well-ground insights, but needs more development in certain areas</td>
<td>Thesis is overall informative, and somewhat interesting and original, but needs further work</td>
<td>Thesis is overall not original, nor informative or particularly interesting. Would have needed a lot more work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>