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Principles and Practices of the *Standards* in College Foreign Language Education

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Chapter 4

In Search of Relevance: The *Standards* and the Undergraduate Foreign Language Curriculum

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Upon their initial development and publication, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (SFL [1996, 1999, 2006]) began influencing foreign language (FL) education in the United States in significant ways. The pedagogical vision of what students “should know and be able to do with another language” represented in the *Standards*’ 5 major goal areas (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) and 11 related content standards offered educators a broadened conception of FL teaching and learning that explicitly rejected a four-skills-plus-culture orientation (Klee, 1998; Scott & Huntington, 2007).

Among the most notable impacts of the *Standards* was their incorporation at the K-12 level into many states’ and local school districts’ curricular guidelines as well as into instructional materials (Allen, 2002; Bragger & Rice, 1999; James, 1998; Phillips, 2003; Wood, 1999). In the years following their first revision in 1999 to include program models for articulated sequences of FL study extending into postsecondary contexts, the *Standards* have continued to be seen as highly relevant to today’s FL profession and have been described as “arguably the document that has dominated pedagogical thinking in US foreign language education for the past decade or so” (Byrnes, 2008, p. 103) and as “catalysts for bringing about new ways of envisioning classroom instruction” (Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, & Sandrock, 2006). These observations are confirmed by ongoing dialogue on the *Standards* in published essays and research studies, professional development workshops, and conference presentations. As a case in point, the 2008 ACTFL conference lists no less than 15 presentations, workshops, and panel discussions on standards-based instruction and assessment with a wide variety of FLs represented. In addition, a 2011 special issue of *Foreign Language Annals* will be dedicated to discussing “Language Learning and the *Standards*.”

Yet despite the *Standards*’ influence on K-12 language education policy and continued discussions of their relevance and application to FL instruction and assessment, in university-level FL departments, tangible impact of the *Standards* in shaping curriculum and classroom instruction has not been wide-ranging. Whereas an ACTFL White Paper (1998) predicted that the *Standards*’ publication “signals the end of business as usual in departments of national languages and literature in our colleges and universities ... it will rock the boat” (James, p. 11); in the following years, numerous publications discussing the *Standards*’ impact on higher education suggest they have been negligible (Beyer, 2000; Kadish, 2000; Knight, 2000; McAlpine, 2000; Steinhart, 2006; Swaffar, 2006; Tucker, 2000).

Among these, Swaffar (p. 248) described the *Standards* as “almost completely ignored” in postsecondary contexts, and Steinhart explained they have “failed to capture the imagination of college faculty” (p. 258). Taking a concrete example, consider the 2007 MLA report, *Foreign Language and Higher Education: New structures for a Changing World*: Among its forthright recommendations, it advocates that FL departments “set clear standards for achievement for undergraduate majors” (p. 7), yet nowhere in the nine-page summary of recommendations regarding “the challenges and opportunities facing language study in higher education” (p. 1) in the United States are the *Standards* mentioned.

In light of this situation, this chapter identifies and discusses three factors that have contributed to the reception of the *Standards* in higher education in general terms and, more specifically, in terms of the advanced undergraduate FL curriculum: the view that postsecondary contexts were not (in its original instantiation) and are not the *Standards*' intended audience; the sense that an articulated continuum of K-16 FL study as posited by the *Standards* may be either impossible or inappropriate; and the perception that the *Standards* are more relevant to language courses than to content-based courses and that they marginalize the role of literature. In addition, and based on the discussion of these three factors, I will respond to the question of whether the *Standards* provide a framework adequate for addressing the critical challenge facing university-level FL programs today, namely, the meaningful integration of language and content across the curriculum.

The *Standards* as a Reflection of Consensus at All Levels

The introductory section of the *Standards* (1999) contains the following statement: “The development of standards has galvanized the field of foreign language education. The degree of involvement, and of consensus, among educators at all levels has been unprecedented” (p. 15). But standing in contrast to this touted consensus was James' (1998) very different interpretation of events leading to the creation of the *Standards*:

While large numbers of university professors of language and literature were paying little if any attention to what was going on, a relative consensus was emerging among the leaders in the pre-college sphere ... There is indignation in the colleges at the thought that pre-college standards might drive the college curriculum. (p. 11)

James' (1998) vision of what happened harkens more to a scenario wherein higher education was blindsided by standards more or less foisted on them by the K-12 sector. So which is the case—the *Standards* document (1999) claiming it was founded on a consensus among educators at all levels or James' assertion that many in higher education were, at the least, ignorant of the *Standards* movement or, worse, opposed to it?

Although little empirical research exists documenting university FL professors' opinions and understandings of the *Standards*, Knight (2000) conducted a

small-scale survey of 34 professors' familiarity with the *Standards*, from which three interesting results can be summarized as follows: First, 75% of the respondents were unfamiliar with the *Standards*. Second, of the 25% familiar with the *Standards*, the majority did not think that "college classes and curricula would need to change to accommodate the various skills of incoming freshmen" (p. 69) who, presumably, had received previous FL instruction based on *Standards*-oriented curricula. Further, Knight explained that many respondents did not see how the *Standards* applied to their subject or the university curriculum. Third, many respondents did not think that incoming students with prior *Standards*-based FL instruction were better prepared for university-level courses, particularly in grammar, or that their communication skills were stronger in comparison to students from the past.

These results, albeit based on the responses of a very small group of professors from three universities, point to several concerns. First and foremost, most respondents (75%) were ignorant of the *Standards* altogether. Second, for those who were aware of the *Standards*, they did not see them as significantly influencing their instructional practices or curricular decision-making. Finally, many rejected the notion that university FL curricula need to be consistent or tailored to fit with students' previous language-learning experiences, an idea to be further developed in the following section of this chapter.

One could argue that the results of Knight's survey could be due to professors' unfamiliarity with the *Standards* or strategies for incorporating them into FL teaching. Although research has not investigated factors impacting the reception of the *Standards* at the postsecondary level, for K-12 teachers, a large-scale study showed that factors influencing teachers' beliefs about the *Standards* included gender, urban versus rural location, membership in professional organization, highest educational degree, and private versus public school (Allen, 2002). A 1998 essay by Welles suggested that FL professors' reluctance to embrace the standards stemmed from the format of the *Standards* document, the language used within it, and professors' unfamiliarity with theories of language acquisition undergirding the *Standards*' content.

McAlpine (2000) described the difficulty involved in implementing the standards in a postsecondary context in spite of coordinated efforts on the part of a FL department to implement professional development for faculty members. Although university-level FL faculty worked together with high school faculty to develop learning scenarios in a workshop led by the former director of the *Standards* project and received a copy of the *Standards* document, McAlpine concluded:

While the above approaches are a good beginning in bringing the *Standards* into the postsecondary world, the *Standards* still have not changed the way the university language faculty delivers its courses. At several faculty meetings the suggestion of using the *Standards* to redesign the university language program has been met with a lukewarm response.... Why wouldn't faculty members want to embrace standards that focus on communication strategies, cultural content, learning strategies, connections with other subjects within the curriculum, critical thinking skills, and technology? Do we believe that these arenas are beyond our scope as university professors? (p. 75)

A possible explanation for why those professors and respondents to Knight's (2000) survey did not see the applicability of the standards to their teaching context is the view that they were not originally designed for higher education and that the chief participants in their design were not FL faculty at the university level (Davis, 1997; Kadish, 2000; Siskin, 1999). Siskin, while identifying the standards as "signifiers of innovation" also called the discourse of consensus surrounding their creation "rhetoric" that "expose[d] a power struggle between K-12 and university pedagogical practice" (p. 86). In addition, Kadish claimed that the most important developers of the *Standards* did not include "professors who teach upper-division college courses" of FLs and added that "[i]t is perhaps not surprising, then that today many professors know nothing about the Standards and have little interest in learning about them" (p. 49). Davis's own reflection on historical and political dimensions of the *Standards'* implementation was consistent with Kadish's claim yet provided an important nuance, inasmuch as he explained that university FL faculty in various specializations were, in fact, actively involved in the *Standards* project, yet the 11-member task force, what they called "the most visible ... element in the development phase," did not include literature professors (p. 153).

To provide some brief background, the *Standards* were developed under Goals 2000, a federal grant supporting the development of K-12 content standards in art, civics and government, English language arts, FLs, geography, history, and science (Davis, 1997; Phillips, 2008). The fact that the *Standards* were funded by the federal government has been cited as a factor causing skepticism on the part of academics who may distrust any form of government intervention in light of strongly held feelings about academic freedom and classroom autonomy (Klein, 2000; McGinnis, 1999; Swaffar, 2006). However, note that FLs were not originally designated as a content area for which standards would be created; it was instead the "intense and well-organized efforts" of ACTFL and the Joint National Committee on Languages to participate in standards-setting that led to FL being included in Goals 2000 (Davis, p. 153). Phillips explained that this choice arose from the sentiment by language educators that "if the profession opted out, efforts to place greater emphasis on language study in schools could not succeed" (p. 94).

A second point concerning the development of the *Standards* and their reception in higher education relates to the task force that worked for 3 years prior to the *Standards'* publication in 1996 to draft, revise, and present the document to the FL profession (Phillips, 2008). This task force was composed of 11 "classroom teachers (elementary and secondary), administrators ... and university faculty (in such fields as teacher preparation, bilingual education, and cross-cultural training)" rather than FL faculty specializing in literature (Davis, p. 153). Though the development and publication of the *Standards* entailed the collaboration of ACTFL and the American Associations of Teachers of French, German, and Spanish and Portuguese, it did not include the MLA, considered by most university-level FL professors as the dominant professional organization, although in 1996 the MLA Executive Council endorsed the document (Bragger & Rice, 1999), specifically citing their agreement with the *Standards'* call for extended sequences of FL learning (Welles, 1998).

In addition, the 1996 *Standards* contained no sample progress indicators or learning scenarios (to describe how particular standards might be met) beyond K-12; in 1999, the Standards document was revised to include progress indicators and learning scenarios for some (but not all) languages—French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. However, those indicators are part of the language-specific *standards* and therefore no “generic” standards across languages were created. Tucker (2000), who compared the various languages’ progress indicators, explained that “important inconsistencies” are found among them, particularly in regard to “how sophisticated the study of literary interpretation should be” (p. 55).

Finally, my own perusal of the 1999 *Standards* document resulted in a surprising observation related to their applicability in higher education. Immediately following the introductory subsection explaining the rationale for K-16 program models, the reader of the document next encounters a chapter entitled “About *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*” (p. 27). In its first paragraph, the various audiences for the *Standards* document are listed as “K-12 foreign language teachers and teacher educators, curriculum writers, administrators, policy makers at all levels of government, parents, and business and community leaders.” However, the mention of university-level FL professors is found nowhere in the document. Perhaps a simple oversight, the unintended message to postsecondary educators might be the one that has, seemingly and unfortunately, been received: The *Standards* were not written for you and do not apply to you.

The Possibility of a Secondary and Postsecondary Continuum

Although the *Standards* (1999) clearly state that “[n]o single continuum of language learning exists for all students” (p. 14) insisting “multiple entry points into the curriculum” are critical to ensure maximal learning opportunities, an ideal K-16 model is posited:

The standards set forth here presume that sequential study for an extended period of time is the ideal for achieving the highest levels of performance in the five goal areas, and the progress indicators also assume that instruction has begun in the early grades and continues throughout the secondary years (most of the language-specific documents attached to this edition extend the sequence into college and university programs). (p. 22)

Further, the document makes the following statements regarding the entry of students into postsecondary FL study:

Students entering colleges and universities of the 21st century will be competent in second languages and cultures.... Students will desire an array of options beyond that of today’s curriculum. Colleges and universities have an exciting challenge to redesign programs in new and innovative ways.... The inclusion of post-secondary

programs in the language-specific documents insures a seamless continuity, student-centered articulation and high levels of performance among graduates. (pp. 21–22)

The preceding citations are informed by at least two assumptions: First, that articulated, coherent instruction would be available to students at the K-12 level; second, that creating a curricular continuum between high school- and university-level FL study is necessary to achieve the ideals set forth by the *Standards*.

However, in terms of the first assumption, little evidence exists that articulated sequences of K-12 FL study are widely available to today's students. Citing research by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted for K-12 FL enrollments from 1987 to 1997, Met (2003) concluded that "significant gaps of equity and access" exist, particularly in public elementary and middle schools (p. 590). A closer examination of CAL data from 1987 to 2007 shows after increases in the number of schools offering FLs as well as total FL enrollments from 1987 to 1997, a statistically significant decline occurred in the number of elementary (31% in 1997, 25% in 2007) and middle schools (75% in 1997, 58% in 2007) offering FLs (CAL, 2008). Only at the high school level did FL offerings remain steady. These figures suggest that the majority of elementary and middle school students are not engaging in FL learning. As Schulz (2006) summarized the situation, "The sad fact is that on the precollegiate level, 2-year FL programs are the norm, 5-year programs are the exception, and U.S. school districts with well-articulated K-12 foreign language instruction are exceedingly rare" (p. 253).

Similarly troubling is the lack of agreement in higher education surrounding the second assumption, namely, that the continuum stipulated in the *Standards* between high school and university-level FL curricula is necessary or desirable. Consider the viewpoints represented in the ADFL "Forum on *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*" (2000) by Beyer and Davis, two FL professors (italics to indicate contrasts between the two opinions are my own). The first reads as follows:

While the Standards indicate common ground for articulation, this topic has been around for the past twenty-five years and seems to defy solutions. Quite frankly, the needs and expectations of the college environment are *dramatically different* from high school realities.... It is *unrealistic* to think that the aims of secondary or postsecondary education need to or even should coincide. (Beyer, p. 59)

Standing in opposition to Beyer's statement is Davis' equally strong assertion:

There are still among us college instructors who *worship religiously the false divide* between secondary-school and college-level language study and teaching.... I dismiss the notion that the goals and objectives of college and university programs are significantly different from those of secondary education programs.... Our role is to continue to build on all the language skills when students enter our college programs. (p. 61)

Once again, we witness the incompatibility of these opinions as well as the fervor evoked as to the question of whether postsecondary FL study should be shaped by what precedes it at the secondary level. Several other publications (Bragger & Rice, 1999; James, 1998; Knight, 2000; Peters, 1999; Siskin, 1999; Steinhart, 2006) have discussed whether curriculum should bubble up, that is, come from elementary and secondary schools, or should be built from the top down, that is, by getting professors to agree on outcomes of university-level FL study. Predictably, opinions vary, with the only consensus being that the lack of articulation between high school- and university-level FL study and the lack of communication between high school- and university-level educators are serious obstacles to improving student learning outcomes, leaving the ideal of an articulated K-16 sequence as envisioned by the *Standards* “yet to be realized” (Steinhart, 2006, p. 258).

But if, in fact, the primary problem responsible for the lack of progress in bridging the gap between FL teaching in high schools and colleges lies in the “clash of cultures between the two levels” as Peters (1999, p. 82) suggested, we are led to ask the following question: How do we define the culture of FL learning and teaching at the postsecondary level and what in this culture renders it incompatible with K-12 *Standards*-oriented instruction?

The Challenge of Integrating Language and Content at the University Level

In responding to the question of if the *Standards* are relevant to the undergraduate FL curriculum and if they could function as a means of meaningfully integrating language and content within the undergraduate FL curriculum, I will first examine the content of the *Standards* and highlight three key elements that are critical to understanding the *Standards*' reception in university FL departments. For each, I will suggest how it relates (or fails to relate) to current challenges and priorities in FL education at the university level.

Framework

The *Standards* are grounded in five interconnected goal areas—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Phillips (2008) explained, “The five goal areas do not suggest a curriculum that builds communicative skills in early years and then layers on culture or literature or specialized content in more advanced courses”; rather, they envision that students will “engage in all these goals at all levels” (p. 94). Each goal contains two to three related content standards, and under each content standard are sample progress indicators that define progress in meeting standards for grades 4, 8, and 12 in the generic *Standards* document. As mentioned in a preceding section, some languages have articulated progress indicators for the “postsecondary” or “grade 16” level.

For most university-level FL educators, the envisioned integration of the different goal areas at all curricular levels posited in the *Standards* is not a curricular reality. A well-documented divide, both pedagogical and structural, exists in most FL departments between lower-division language and upper-division

content (e.g., literature) courses (Byrnes, 2001; Kramsch, 1993). The critical issue of the bifurcated undergraduate curriculum was addressed in the recent MLA report “*Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World*,” which stated that the “two-tiered language-literature structure” needs to be replaced by “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, literature, and culture are taught as a coherent whole” (p. 3).

For students, the classroom culture, materials and activities, and assessment in lower-division courses vary significantly from those of upper-division ones. For teachers, there is often little communication between lower-division instructors, typically teaching assistants and non tenure-stream faculty, and those teaching the upper-division courses, usually tenured and tenure-stream faculty (Maxwell, 2003; Modern Language Association, 2007; Swaffar, 2006). Rifkin (2006) called this lack of communication “the principal obstacle to curricular success.” Certainly the notion of barriers to curricular coherence applies implementing the *Standards* in the undergraduate curriculum as it is only in lower-division FL courses where the *Standards* have made some impact in shaping instructional materials such as textbooks and syllabi (Barnes-Karol, 2000; Knight, 2000; Schulz, 2006). Given the factors listed earlier, there is little chance that the *Standards* will bubble up from lower-level to higher-level courses.

Overarching Goal

The *Standards* (1999) center on “[w]hat students should know and be able to do with another language,” (p. 32) a definition that is almost synonymous with communicative competence (Hymes, 1971) the concept explicitly foregrounded in the introduction to the Communication standard (p. 40). Although this important goal would seem to apply to the entire undergraduate FL curriculum, it is more readily identified with lower-level language courses. Kramsch (2006) explained that because communicative competence emerged as an important framing construct for language learning in the 1970s, its implications have evolved:

Not only has communicative competence become reduced to its spoken modality, but it has often been taken as an excuse largely to do away with grammar and to remove much of the instructional responsibility from the teacher who becomes a mere facilitator of group and pair work in conversational activities. In public life, the notion of communication has changed its meaning ... communication has been slowly resignified to mean the ability to exchange information speedily and effectively and to solve problems, complete assigned tasks, and produce measurable results. (p. 250)

Any university-level FL professor engaged in teaching upper-level content courses recognizes little in these limited notions of communicative competence and communication that are consistent with the goals of advanced FL learning and teaching in the university context. Although the continued development of communication in various modalities is of critical importance, the more obvious goal (stated or otherwise) typically present in the advanced undergraduate curriculum and the one missing in this notion of communicative competence is analysis and interpretation of FL texts, a point to be developed further in the following section.

Instructional Approach

The *Standards* do not stipulate a favored approach or approaches conducive to bringing about desired learning outcomes (“a variety of approaches can successfully lead learners to the standards”) but claim the best approach depends on factors such as the learner’s age, learning preferences, and goals (1999, p. 24). However, because the *Standards* foreground communicative competence and focus on developing communicative FL abilities in three modes (Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational), they have been closely associated with communicative language teaching (CLT) (Byrnes, 2006, 2008; Magnan, 2008; Schulz, 2006). Although CLT might be called the most dominant approach to FL teaching employed in the United States since the 1990s, in recent years, its adequacy for university-level FL teaching and learning has come into question (Kern, 2000; Kramersch, 2006; Schulz, 2006; Steinhart, 2006; Swaffar, 2006). These criticisms, centering on perceived limitations of communicatively oriented lower-division FL courses, have included the following:

1. CLT’s overemphasis on orality in normative contexts rather than the development of a “broad range of communicative acts”(Kramersch, 2006; Swaffar, 2006, p. 246);
2. CLT’s relative lack of success in developing students’ extended discourse competence and written communicative abilities, capabilities that are extremely important in academic contexts (Kern, 2000; Steinhart, 2006);
3. CLT’s association (fairly or not) with deemphasizing accurate language use, that is, focus on grammar (Kramersch, 2006; Schulz, 2006).

Perhaps, the perceived failures of CLT and its implicit relationship to the *Standards* may inform many university-level FL faculty’s view of the relevance of the *Standards* to their context of teaching and their goals for their students. Several scholars (Magnan, 2008; Schulz, 2006; Steinhart, 2006) have pointed to this observation and to the differences between the ideals of the *Standards*, representing a vision articulated more than a decade ago of what it means to know and use a FL, and the somewhat different understandings of FL learning and the real-life challenges faced by university FL departments that inform professional dialogue today. In the following section, I will discuss one such challenge facing FL programs today, namely, the meaningful integration of language and content across the curriculum and whether the *Standards* provide a framework to address this ongoing dilemma.

Toward a Meaningful Role for the Standards in Higher Education?

Although the *Standards* envision coherent, integrated sequences of FL study wherein students engage in each of the five goal areas at every curricular level (Phillips, 2008), in undergraduate FL education, this ideal is not a reality. Lower-division FL courses typically focus on interactive oral communication in

normative contexts, whereas upper-division courses emphasize analysis and discussion of literary texts. For various reasons outlined earlier, the *Standards* are seen to “fit” more readily with the goals of lower-level language courses than with advanced-level content courses. Indeed, the *Standards*’ expanded vision of what it means to know and use a FL challenges practices and norms of the advanced undergraduate FL courses in at least two ways.

First, the *Standards* explicitly prioritize the goal of developing FL learners’ communicative competence, whereas advanced undergraduate courses often de-emphasize explicit attention to language development, operating under the assumption that students already possess adequate linguistic skills to discuss and analyze literary texts (Steinhart, 2006). Upon reflection, this is a rather ironic assumption, as it is often faculty teaching advanced-level literature or cultural studies courses who criticize deficiencies related to reading, writing, and grammar they perceive in their students, who have learned language with a CLT paradigm, yet they persist in ignoring the need to incorporate linguistic objectives into their own courses.

In recent years, research on classroom communication in advanced undergraduate FL courses has revealed problems associated with the “completely unrealistic” expectation that content should be the sole focus of instruction (Steinhart, 2006, p. 260) and that advanced language use emerges naturally during literary discussions. For example, several qualitative studies of upper-level literature courses showed that students did not engage in sustained interactions with peers or their teachers nor did they use the FL in advanced ways (such as defending opinions, elaborating, hypothesizing, or initiating dialogue with others); moreover, lecturing, controlling the topic of discussion, and asking questions for which they already knew the answers was common on the part of teachers (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Mantero, 2002; Zyzick & Polio, 2008). In addition, Maxwell (2003) suggested that a disconnect exists between students’ goals for engaging in advanced-level FL study, typically to use the language in a professional setting, and departments’ own goals at that level of the curriculum for preparing students to engage in graduate-level FL study. This observation was also supported by Donato and Brooks, who found significant differences between teachers’ and students’ goals related to literature study.

Issues highlighted in these studies of advanced FL learning within literature courses lead us to consider the second way that the *Standards* challenge practices in the undergraduate FL curriculum—by decentralizing literature’s role. In fact, the *Standards* posit literature as one possibility in a list of “cultural content” that students “will need to have access to,” a list that also includes everyday life situations, social institutions, contemporary and historical issues, art, and cultural attitudes and priorities (*Standards*, 1999, p. 34). Tucker (2000) criticized the near-total absence of literature in K-12 learning scenarios in the first version of the *Standards*—with just 2 of 34 learning scenarios incorporating literary texts—and the same trend is found in the 1999 *Standards*, which contain only 2 of 33 learning scenarios involving literature. On the other hand, a great number of the scenarios include informational texts with a few indicating the use of film. This perceived marginalization of literature in the *Standards* is troubling for

university FL professors as it calls into question literature's place in advanced FL learning and the pedagogies that inform the upper-level FL curriculum (Scott & Huntington, 2007; Tucker, 2000).

Could it be that the *Standards'* most notable impact on FL study in higher education is not in the form of concrete curricular or instructional changes but, instead, in the ways in which it provoked, from its inception, and continues to motivate a reexamination of how and what teachers teach and what they prioritize as pedagogical goals in FL departments (Beyer, 2000; Scott & Huntington, 2007)? After all, the *Standards* must be credited, at least in part, with leading post-secondary FL educators to grapple with the notions of spiraling content and language in meaningful ways, of thinking beyond a four-skills-plus-culture approach, and considering the role of context in various forms of communication.

Although these rather nebulous outcomes do not match initial expectations of those involved in the *Standards* project, the 1996 document and its revisions (1999, 2006) have provoked a tremendous amount of dialogue in the form of published essays and opinion pieces. Among these, the *ADFL Bulletin's* two-part "Forum on the Standards for Foreign Language Learning" (1999, 2000) included 18 published responses including 17 by university FL professors ("Forum," 1999, p. 70). In addition, since the inception of *The Modern Language Journal* "Perspectives" column (a position paper on an issue related to second or FL teaching and learning followed by several commentaries) in 2002, the role of the *Standards* has been discussed in several issues including columns on language education policy in the United States (*The Modern Language Journal*, 87, vol. 4), the relation between the goals of FL study and the metaphors dominating FL pedagogy (*The Modern Language Journal*, 90, vol. 2), and the assessment and evaluation of university-level FL programs (*The Modern Language Journal*, 90, vol. 4). That the *Standards* continue to figure in these discussions indicates their relevance to real-world issues facing the FL profession as well as, more specifically, to concerns of university FL departments. On the other hand, in comparison to the numerous publications discussing and debating the merits of the *Standards* and the viability of their implementation at the postsecondary level, the number of published reports documenting their actual implementation by FL departments or individual professors is much shorter (Barnes-Karol, 2000; Gifford & Mullaney, 1998; Mathews & Hansen, 2004; Morris, 2006; Tucker, 2000; Yamada & Moeller, 2000).

It also bears mention when situating the *Standards* in their historical context and discussing their reception in higher education that they did not initiate a professional dialogue seeking change in the goals, means, and assessment of FL study when published in 1996; such dialogue was already in motion. Coinciding with the publication of the *Standards* in the mid-1990s, momentum for change was building, partially in response to the perceived limitations of CLT as a framework for postsecondary FL study (as previously discussed in this chapter). This momentum was evidenced in the appearance of several volumes dedicated to rethinking the undergraduate FL curriculum over the next decade (Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Kramsch, 1995; Scott & Tucker, 2001; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). So, although the *Standards* may not be credited for sparking this dialogue for change, as Beyer (2000) noted, they certainly "provide[d] a new context for the latest series of

self-studies and reappraisals, at the college level, of what and how we have been teaching in the past decade” (p. 59). In fact, several scholars have framed their own reflections on the *Standards* within a larger professional climate seeking change: Siskin (1999) described them, for university-level FL educators, as “signifiers of innovation, within a larger discourse of change that drives the profession” (p. 86) and Long (2000) called them “one of the megatrends in foreign language study ... [that] are steering us to the common ground of culturally based foreign language education” (p. 74).

During the years following the *Standards*' publication in 1996, however, the doomsday prediction of James (1998) that failing to implement the *Standards* at the university level would result in significant declines in FL enrollments was not fulfilled. That said, continued healthy post-secondary FL enrollments might be credited more realistically to external forces (e.g., heightened interest in FL education in light of post 9/11 national security needs, the economic pressures of globalization, steadily increasing heritage language populations) rather than efforts of university-level FL educators to put into place coherent, articulated sequences of language study or agree on common goals for FL learning (Modern Language Association, 2007). Current enrollment trends confirm the impact of these forces—since 2002, overall FL enrollments have increased by 13%, helped by a proliferation in the diversity of FL studied and significant growth in the study of languages such as Arabic, Chinese, and Korean (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007).

In many ways, the same challenges that existed in 1996 when the *Standards* were first published still inform professional dialogue about FL study at the university level today. Ultimately, the *Standards* do not provide us an adequate blueprint for designing integrated university FL curricula. As James described them, the *Standards* provide “a destination rather than a road-map” (1998, p. 14). In other words, they are more outcome- than process-oriented; they point us to goals but do not show us the pathways (or approaches) to reach those goals. And though this flexibility may be, in many ways, desirable and necessary, given their design to be applied in various educational contexts, university-level FL departments struggle most with the very things (i.e., approach and curricular articulation) not addressed in the *Standards*. As Byrnes (2008) pointed out:

The *Standards* document remains largely silent on precisely how those learning goals are to be attained. In a curious two-step it presents itself as a “framework for the reflective teacher to use in weaving [these] curricular experiences into the fabric of language learning” while restricting itself to pedagogical guidance and offering little explicit treatment of curricular issues. (p. 104)

Where does this leave university FL departments? In short, we are still searching for guiding frameworks, overarching goals, and instructional approaches to inform how and what we teach. Moreover, it remains an open question whether any one approach, framework, or set of goals could possibly “fit” for what, in reality, is a varied landscape of institutions of higher education and populations of FL learners who continue language study for varied reasons. This reservation

aside, a number of promising approaches and pedagogical frameworks, many informed by research from linguistics, education, and psychology, have gained visibility and attention from members of the higher education FL community over the past decade as viable starting points for rethinking the undergraduate FL curriculum. These include a multiple literacies approach (Kern, 2000; The New London Group, 1996; Swaffar & Arens, 2005), genre-based approaches (Byrnes, 2008), and symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006). In addition, there is some evidence that these concepts are serving as useful means for moving toward more integrated curricula wherein it is not necessary to privilege textual analysis over oral communication or vice versa; a number of publications provide concrete examples of how these approaches have been successfully implemented at various levels of the curriculum (e.g., Allen, in press; Byrnes & Sprang, 2004; Paesani, 2006; Swaffar, 2004).

In conclusion, as Tesser (2002) suggested in her discussion of the role of the *Standards* in higher education, it is ultimately less important whether one embraces or rejects the *Standards* than whether one takes advantage of engaging in a dialogue about what they represent—finding meaningful and coherent ways to teach FL. Considered in this way, the *Standards* can be seen as an important document within a professional dialogue that has, since their publication in the mid-1990s, both continued to pursue certain ideals embodied in it and evolved as new directions have emerged in FL-learning pedagogy and research.

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