French Composition-writing assessment  
Spring/Fall 2013 French 101A  
Professor Alex Wolpe  

For several years I have been showing a French film in my French 101A classes. The film is “Au revoir les enfants” or “Goodbye children” by Louis Malle. I traditionally give three composition topics based on the film for students to choose from. The topics vary in their degree of difficulty. They may simply 1.describe in French their favorite scene in the film, 2.discuss the symbolic references to the United States in the film or 3.discuss the roles of religion and Naziism in the film. They are asked to use only the French grammar we have used in the class and not to use translation software, the composition is to be written entirely in French. They are not to plagiarize.

I used a rubric system to evaluate the compositions on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest point value. Each composition was evaluated for:
  • content (originality of ideas, coherency of thought and relevance to the film)
  • grammar
  • style
  • vocabulary

The following data was gathered from the 14 compositions submitted; the 4 categories were averaged to a single number for each student:
  - Student A: 4
  - Student B: 3
  - Student C: 3
  - Student D: 2.5
  - Student E: 2
  - Student F: 3.5
  - Student G: 3
  - Student H: 3.5
  - Student I: 4
  - Student J: 2
  - Student K: 2.5
  - Student L: 4.5
  - Student M: 4
  - Student N: 2

The average of these scores was just over a 3.

The following term (Fall 2013) I decided to give the same assignment approximately 1 month later in the course on Nov.11, the previous term assignment had been given on March 14, and I was hoping the students might be better able to handle the assignment because of the added work we did in French grammar, and especially in French culture and history (I had student research Vichy France, the German Occupation and the French Resistance), prior to showing the film and giving the composition assignment. The research assignment had not been given in the FALL 2013 term.

Only seven students handed in the composition and these were the results evaluated using the same method as previously stated:
  - Student A: 4
Student B: 2.5  
Student C: 4  
Student D: 3.5  
Student E: 1.75  
Student F: 2.5  
Student G: 3.5

Student B was a DSPS student and Student E struggled in all aspects of the class. The average without those two results is 3.5, which shows a marked improvement over the prior year. The average with all the results is almost the same (just over 3). While a 3rd semester comparison might give more conclusive results statistically, I am satisfied that delaying the assignment and having student contextualize the film with the research they do is the correct way to continue with this particular project.