On Wednesday, March 30, 2016, the Center for Language Excellence (CLE) presented the workshop entitled “Designing an Effective Foreign Language Placement Test”. The workshop had 23 attendees including four staff and language instructors from nine different departments, servicing thirteen different languages (Chinese, English/SLS, Estonian, Finnish, French, Hindi-Urdu, Indonesian, Korean, Mongolian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, and Zulu). The presentation was led by Maria Shardakova, Director of Language Assessment for the Center for Language Excellence.

This workshop was the twenty-second of a series of workshops offered by CLE.

The workshop began with a brief introduction from each attendee and what they hoped to learn from the presentation, including the type of placement tests they already have, whether they want to develop online versions, the type of students they intend to test (traditional learners vs. heritage learners).

The presenter addressed general issues of online placement tests – e.g., IU units involved in testing development, administering, and hosting. The presenter discussed the need for a communal effort in the development of foreign language placement tests. The presenter also stressed the necessity of aligning foreign language curricula (and assessment) with proficiency guidelines and general proficiency frameworks, such as ACTFL proficiency guidelines or Common European Framework.

The presenter briefly surveyed the FL placement test currently available at IU and distributed through the First Year Experience Office website: Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Latin, and Spanish. The question was asked how to get your language on the “map”? The presenter also discussed the different approaches to testing exhibited in the current placement tests.

Then, the presenter explained general principles of the development of language placement tests – e.g., aligning test rubrics and items with a particular language curriculum; devising test items so to increase the content validity; field-testing the instrument. The presenter exemplified do’s and don’ts when devising test items and field testing the instrument. Methods to increase the test reliability were also discussed and exemplified. The issue of scoring, including cut-off points, was discussed and various approaches to scoring were exemplified.

**Topics included:**
What is the purpose of the test?
What is the technological capability and aspects of the test?
Who are the intended test-takers?
How to define the acceptable performance?

**Steps included:**
Aligning test rubrics/items with curriculum
Defining benchmarks (grammar; listening; reading – skills that can be assessed with the current technology at IU)
Developing test-prompts (grammar)
Developing test-prompts (comprehension/interpretive mode)
Increasing validity
Field testing
Ensuring reliability

The workshop ended with a series of questions to the presenter. Participants were welcomed to share their experiences and concerns about the creation and use of placement tests.

The post-workshop survey evaluation included participant comments, such as:
“Thank you!”
“I enjoyed the workshop.”
“The presenter addressed the issue of the mismatch between curriculum that is proficiency-based and the more passive format of placement tests. The detailed steps and things to consider under each step is helpful.”