MEMORANDUM

TO: Mindy McWilliams

FROM: Jennifer Long

DATE: March 30, 2012

RE: CERES’ Closing the Loop Grant

In June 2011, CERES received a grant of $900 from the Office of the Provost as part of the Closing the Loop Assessment program. These funds were to “support testing of advanced Russian students in the M.A. program in order to assess the effectiveness of a USED-awarded grant project” that encourages CERES to produce graduates that achieve a high level of foreign language proficiency combined with a multidisciplinary approach to area studies. In addition, the testing assesses “program-level learning goals” that include students’ achievement of foreign language proficiency in at least one regional language. The testing thus assesses CERES’ achievement in producing graduates who meet these standards of foreign language proficiency.

In January and May, 2011, CERES contracted with an ACTFL-certified (see http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1) tester to evaluate the oral proficiency level of six students in sixth-level Russian (RUSS-494), the highest level offered. The initial evaluation in January ranked 3 at the advanced-mid level, 2 at the advanced-low level and one at the superior level. (Please see below for an explanation of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines). These findings were in line with ACTFL guidelines for advanced level study, and revealed that our method of placing students in language courses is sound. The students were tested again in May and found that one student at advanced-low moved to advanced-mid and two students at advanced-mid moved to advanced-high (all other scores remained the same). This progress was impressive for just one semester of coursework.

This evaluation demonstrates that CERES students’ foreign language instruction is both an effective use of USED grant funds and in line with program-level learning goals, as those at the advanced level of study meet and even exceed national recognized standards for advanced foreign language study. In terms of achieving the program’s goal that students achieve proficiency in at least one regional language, we found that all students in the advanced class tested at the advanced level and there was no pattern to their strengths and weaknesses. Achieving this level of oral proficiency is indicative of the written proficiency level of our students and ensures that they are able to achieve the program goal of being able to conduct original research using source material in a regional language for their research.

CERES is continuing this testing of advanced Russian students in 2012-13 using departmental funds. The Closing the Loop Grant was instrumental in initiating this testing process that will continue over the course of the USED grant. As we continue the testing, we will be able to assess our success in educating students to advanced levels of foreign language proficiency – and, if needed, alter course offerings to address any deficiencies that appear. As the data strongly support program practices at this point, it is a useful indicator that goals and curriculum are aligned.
The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Speaking
describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The Guidelines describe the tasks that speakers can handle at each level, as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with tasks at each level. They also present the limits that speakers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level. These Guidelines can be used to evaluate speech that is either Interpersonal (interactive, two-way communication) or Presentational (one-way, non-interactive).