

The Assistant Teacher/Oral Practice Session Program (AT/OPS)

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OPS are small-group Oral Practice Sessions that many students in our Core language classes attend once per week. They are essentially **oral homework** and give you the opportunity to practice efficiently and then receive immediate feedback on your oral expression and listening comprehension. The exercises are streamlined and acted out to afford you the maximum amount of time to rehearse your speaking ability with materials important to your professor. The Assistant Teachers (ATs) do their utmost to help you understand at least the core concept of the materials you are repeating or transforming according to certain linguistic principles deemed helpful to your progress. Wherever possible and appropriate, ATs use gestures and props to help you associate words with actions and objects. However, as is the case even in your native language, you are not expected to understand everything at all times. Some amount of guesswork and good will on your part will often be necessary for learning a foreign language. The ATs try their best to be clear, effective, consistent, energetic, friendly and humorous. **But please do not interrupt the OPS to ask a grammar question;** ATs are **not** permitted to explain grammar points in the OPS, only to demonstrate them by example as the goal of the one OPS you take each week is **your** oral practice. You may, however, want to look quizzical or ask in the language for the AT to repeat, in which case the AT could supply a clarifying gesture or an additional example. To help you focus on items relevant to expressing yourself to speakers of the language, you should notice an increasing number of personalized questions being practiced in the OPS as the course progresses. Please also remember that ATs are fellow students and do not grade although they do take attendance.

We have analyzed more than three thousand questionnaires that students have completed since the OPS began in 1998. Students' collective opinions have been in the great majority highly positive. Almost all students who completed a questionnaire for our analysis have noted that the OPS helped them improve their vocabulary, pronunciation and listening comprehension. Approximately thirty percent (30%) of the nearly 200 students responding in Spring 2001 or

2004, for example, also believe that the OPS directly helped them improve their grades in grammar as well. Instructors have observed that both students' retention of aural (listening) materials and their ability to produce longer and more intelligible phrases have improved. These results conform well to our principal OPS goal: **to help you improve your command of the oral language**. The OPS serve as a **rehearsal** of high-priority materials like vocabulary, culture (including gestures), grammar, pronunciation, and intonation. You can then apply all these to activities to your professor's class. Improving on these aspects increases your intelligibility to a native speaker of the language you are studying. Improving on these aspects increases your intelligibility to a native speaker of the language you are studying, part of the Core mission in the Dept. of Modern Languages and Literatures and printed in the *Undergraduate Catalog*.

If you are attending an OPS during the pandemic, please be sure to maintain social distancing when entering and exiting the classroom as well as in the spacing of the semicircle(s) of chairs we commonly use for these sessions. Be sure to keep all food and drink under your chair. Also, you may find that wearing a face mask with a transparent mouth area assists the AT in knowing how to help you better model the pronunciation of challenging sounds.

Since the OP sessions generally consist of rehearsed items, you may want to think of your AT as a language coach helping you prepare for your class performance. Your professor will usually be the one to extend this practice to more open situations where you can "put it all together." If you have any questions about how the OPS fit into our curriculum, please feel free to ask your professor, the OPS Supervisors or Dr. Goldfield, the AT/OPS Program Director. For other languages or levels, please see the Director. Also, since ATs are your peers, you may want to ask them about the OPS program. Perhaps we'll see you one day as an aspiring AT candidate!