



## School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies Course Outline

### LALS 524: Language Testing, Trimester 3, 2006

#### 1. Course Coordinator:

Peter Gu            Office:     von Zedlitz Building, Room VZ214  
                         Phone:     463 5606 (direct line)   Fax: 463 5604  
                         E-mail:     Peter.Gu@vuw.ac.nz  
                         Post:       School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies  
                                 Victoria University of Wellington  
                                 PO Box 600  
                                 Wellington 6001  
                                 NEW ZEALAND

#### 2. Staff:            Peter Gu

#### 3. Class times and rooms:   Wednesday 4-6 pm, 24 Kelburn Parade, Room 203

The class meets on the following ten dates:

November 15, 22, 29, December 6, 13, 20 [Break], January 10, 17, 24, 31.

For distance students, the course is available at <http://blackboard.vuw.ac.nz>. When you enrol you will automatically be given a computer user account, which will be on your *Confirmation of Study* form. Usually, it is the first six letters of your family name and four letters of your first name. So if your name is Robert Cameron, your user name might be *camerorobe*. Your password will be your student ID number. You need to use this computer user account when you access journals from off-campus. For help, contact [scs-hda@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:scs-hda@vuw.ac.nz) or phone (04) 463 5050. If you want to use other student computing services, you need to call the SCS Help Desk on (04) 463 5050. Staff will re-confirm your username and re-set your password after confirming your identity. Useful websites include <http://manuka.its.vuw.ac.nz/its/scs> and <http://distance.scs.vuw.ac.nz/>. If you are an international student the following site could be useful for you <http://www.victoria-international.ac.nz/>.

Distance students are welcome to come to the class if they are in Wellington. Contact Peter Gu for details.

Online enrolment is now available for students wanting to study at Victoria University in 2007. The website is [www.vuw.ac.nz/enrol](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/enrol)

#### 4. Announcements:   MA notice board Level 2 Von Zedlitz

Some additional information relevant to this course can be found in the School MA Handbook for 2006. The handbook is available on the web.

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/degrees/docs/handbook%202006.pdf>

**5. LALS main office:** VZ 210, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Von Zedlitz Building, Kelburn Parade

**6. LALS 524 Course Administrator:** Jane Dudley, Postgraduate administration  
Tel: 463 5600/463 5255/472 1000 ext 8386  
Web contact: [www.blackboard.vuw.ac.nz](http://www.blackboard.vuw.ac.nz)

**7. Aims:** The general aim is to undertake a survey of current concepts, procedures and issues in language testing, with the primary focus on the use of tests and examinations to assess the achievement or proficiency of second language learners.

**8. Objectives:** By the end of the course, course members should be able to

- 1) understand various approaches to assessment and the qualities of a good language test.
- 2) be familiar with a range of testing procedures and be able to critically evaluate them.
- 3) know what is involved in designing and developing a test for a particular purpose
- 4) demonstrate an ability to carry out certain aspects of the test development process, including some basic statistical analysis.

**9. Content:** The following topics will be covered in the course. The reading for each topic is indicated under the topic. The full references can be found in the table of contents of the set readings.

1	15 November	What is a language test? McNamara, Chap 1, plus Text 1 (pp. 87-88) Readings: Brown & Hudson
2	22 November	Communication and the design of language tests McNamara, Chap 2, plus Texts 2-5 (pp. 89-94) Readings: Fulcher; Bachman
3	29 November	The testing cycle McNamara, Chap 3, plus Texts 6-7 (pp. 95-98) Readings: Bachman & Palmer; McDowell
4	6 December	The rating process McNamara, Chap 4, plus Texts 8-11 (pp. 98-104) Readings: A. Brown; Weigle
5	13 December	Validation McNamara, Chap 6, plus Texts 12-13 (pp. 104-106) Readings: Messick; Wall, Clapham & Alderson
6	20 December	Measurement McNamara, Chap 6, plus Texts 14-15 (pp. 106-110) Readings: Alderson, Clapham & Wall
7	10 January	The social character of language tests McNamara, Chap 7, plus Texts 16-19 (pp. 110-116) Readings: Shohamy
8	17 January	New directions and dilemmas

McNamara, Chap 8, plus Text 20 (pp. 116-119)

Readings: Johnson & Brine; Stansfield

9 24 January The design of test tasks  
Readings: Read; Weir; Foot; Saville & Hargreaves; Kroll & Reid

10 31 January Language testing and language teaching  
Reading: Cheng & Curtis; Wall; Hayes & Read

**10. Texts:** There are two required texts.

The set text is McNamara, T. (2000). *Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The set readings *LALS 524 Set Readings* are available at \$18.10 from the Student Notes Distribution Centre.

**11. Assessment:** The course will be assessed by two assignments and two shorter tasks.

Task 1, due Wed 6 December	10% (500 words)	Course objective 1
Assignment 1, due Wed 20 December	30% (1500 words)	Course objective 1, 2
Task 2, due Wed 17 January	10% ("500 words")	Course objective 4
Assignment 2, due Wed 14 February	50% (3000 words)	Course objectives 3, 4

Tasks and assignments can be submitted as e-mail attachments. Please submit each one as a single document in either WORD or WordPerfect format, and e-mail them to [LALS-524@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:LALS-524@vuw.ac.nz). If you send them by post, please include **two** copies of each assignment/task. One will be returned to you with comments on it. The other will be retained for external examining. The postal address is on page 1 of this outline. You can also hand them in through the Assignments slot by the door to the School Office (VZ 210). The assignment topics and tasks are described in this course outline.

**N.B.** Note that if no work is submitted for assessment before the last three weeks of teaching, there will be nothing on which to base an aegrotat consideration.

**Task 1** (500 words) (due Wednesday 6 December)

Choose a particular language test or assessment taken by students in your institution (preferably a different test from the one you write about for Assignment 1).

Briefly outline how the six qualities of usefulness identified by Bachman and Palmer (1996) can be applied in this case. Which qualities are given priority in the way the test is designed and administered? Do you think ideally the balance of qualities should be different?

**Assignment 1** (1500 words) (due Wednesday 20 December)

Write a *concise* review of an existing test. The review should include an analytical description of the test and an evaluation of how good it is for its intended purpose. It should be a test that you can obtain adequate information about, from sources such as a test manual, user handbook, research report, your own involvement in the testing programme and/or an interview with someone else with direct involvement. (It is not sufficient to base the review simply on a sample test paper.) The main options to choose from are:

- a major international proficiency test, such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, MELAB or one of the Cambridge Main Suite Exams (FCE, CAE, CPE, etc)

- a published test such as the Oxford Placement Test or the Quick Placement Test
- a test administered on a reasonably large scale by a university, school or other institution (not one for a particular class or course).

If you choose one of the large-scale tests, you should focus on just one component, eg IELTS Reading, the TOEFL writing test, FCE listening.

Here are some points to include (don't try to cover all of them – be selective):

#### Background Information

- The purpose of the test (for what kinds of decisions?)
- The educational and/or social context

#### Test Design and Procedures

- The content and format of each part of the test (types of text, items, tasks)
- The scoring or rating procedures
- The adequacy of the information about the test available to teachers and learners

#### The Quality of the Test

##### Validity

- The suitability of the test for its intended purpose(s)
- The relevance of the test to language teaching objectives

##### Reliability

- What evidence there is that the test produces consistent, dependable results (if subjective judgements are involved, how well trained are the raters/markers?)

##### Practicality

- Whether the test can be administered and scored adequately, given the resources available

- Do not just describe the test; add as many analytical and evaluative comments as you can.

### **Task 2** (due Wednesday 17 January)

Administer a language test to a group of students and make an analysis of the results, using some of the statistics presented in the chapter by Alderson, Clapham and Wall. Then present the statistical analyses with some interpretive comments about them.

(Note: If you don't have access to a group of learners, contact me and I will arrange an alternative task.)

#### Guidelines:

- It can be an existing test; you don't have to write one specifically for this purpose.
- It should be a test made up of items marked right or wrong, such as multiple-choice, matching, true-false, or fill-in-the-blank.
- The group of learners can be a single class or a larger grouping.
- The statistics should include mean and standard deviation; a reliability statistic; and item difficulty and discrimination for each of the items.

### **Assignment 2** (3000 words) (due Wednesday 14 February)

This involves the design and development of a test for a specified purpose, preferably for a population of learners you are working with or are familiar with. If you are able to arrange it, the work for the assignment should include the trialling of at least some of the test material with a suitable group of learners, plus an analysis of the results. Otherwise, I can work out with you some

other form of empirical data-gathering as a substitute. You should discuss your topic with me in advance **no later than Friday 19 January**.

**12. Penalties:** Assignments and tasks must be submitted by the due date. There is no penalty for late submission but permission must be sought and a good reason given. Try to keep within the word limits especially for the tasks. Assignments and tasks which are plagiarised will not receive a grade and cannot be resubmitted.

### **13. Relationship between assessment and course objectives:**

The assignments provide an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of issues involved in language testing, to evaluate a range of testing procedures, and to experience the designing and developing of a language test. The tasks assess the practical application of ideas and comprehension of the set texts and set readings.

**14. Workload:** LALS 524 is a fifteen point one-trimester paper. Course members should expect to spend about 12 hours per week for ten weeks on all the work for this course including lectures.

**15. Mandatory Course Requirements (Terms):** There are minimum course requirements which must be satisfied to be assessed for the final grade. In order to meet these requirements, course members must

- complete the 2 tasks,
- attend all the ten classes or participate at least once in each of the ten web-based discussions, and
- complete the 2 assignments.

**16. Attendance:** On-campus course members must attend all ten lectures. If an absence is unavoidable, then the course member should participate in the Blackboard Discussion Board for that week. Course members studying by distance must make a contribution to each one of the ten Discussion Boards.

## **General University policies and statutes**

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar available in hard copy or under 'About Victoria' on the VUW home page at [www.vuw.ac.nz](http://www.vuw.ac.nz).

### **Student and staff conduct**

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps are to be taken if there is a complaint. For information about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor or refer to the statute on the VUW policy website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct)

The Policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct)

## Academic grievances

If you have any academic problems with your course you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned; class representatives may be able to help you in this. If you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the relevant Associate Dean; VUWSA Education Coordinators are available to assist in this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievance Policy which is published on the VUW website at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances)

## Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means *no cheating*. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

*The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one's own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.*

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

*Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.*

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk. Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course
- suspension from the course or the University.

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html)

## Students with Impairments (see Appendix 3 of the Assessment Handbook)

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials or in meeting the course requirements, please contact the course coordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively, you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support Services (DSS) to discuss your individual needs and the available options and support on a confidential basis. DSS are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building:

Telephone: 463-6070

Email: [disability@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:disability@vuw.ac.nz)

The School's Disability Liaison Person for 2006 is Dr Dianne Bardsley, ext 5644, email [Dianne.Bardsley@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Dianne.Bardsley@vuw.ac.nz).

## Student Support

Staff at Victoria want students to have positive learning experiences at the University. Each faculty has a designated staff member who can either help you directly if your academic progress is causing you concern, or quickly put you in contact with someone who can. In the Faculty of

Humanities and Social Sciences the support contact is **Dr Allison Kirkman, Murphy Building, room 407**. Assistance for specific groups is also available from the Kaiwawao Maori, Manaaki Pihipihinga or Victoria International.

In addition, the Student Services Group (email: [student-services@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:student-services@vuw.ac.nz)) is available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at:

[www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/)

VUWSA employs Education Coordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and faculty delegates. The Education Office (tel. 463-6983 or 463-6984, email at [education@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:education@vuwsa.org.nz)) is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building.