

From: Foster, Gary
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2008 10:06 AM
To: Roszkowski, Christie
Cc: Hanner, Mary Anne
Subject: foreign language proposal

DATE: 21 March 2008

TO: Dr. Christie Roszkowski
Chair, CAA

FROM: Dr. Gary Foster
Chair, Sociology/Anthropology

RE: Proposal to increase foreign language to 3 semesters

I write in opposition to the proposal to increase the foreign language graduation requirement to three semesters, and do so with the full recognition that such a position may be perceived as “anti-intellectual,” though I would hope that my expressed opposition would provide some catalyst for genuine intellectual reflection and debate and not be seen as some dichotomous anti-academic position.

First, I would note that of the cited language requirements at other institutions, the modal requirement is two semesters, and overwhelmingly, when three or more semesters are required, it is specific to, and dependent upon degree, area, or program. That seems most reasonable to allow academic units and programs to decide if their students would derive substantial benefit from an additional semester of a foreign language. Such a requirement could, indeed, enhance some majors, but would be problematic for others.

Second, I would note that the proposal, which would impact the entire institution, is being made by a single department and not a university-wide committee driven by any empirical assessment. Thus, I am not persuaded that any academic need is being justified. I seriously doubt that a third semester in another language would make the student fluent in the language. That would come only with some considerable immersion in the culture. I do not doubt that an additional semester of a foreign language would have intellectual benefit, but I also believe that intellectual benefit would be derived from nine hours of math or twelve hours of biological and physical sciences. Nearly every day, I read news articles about how we, as a nation, are falling behind other nations in math and sciences. I also believe that global and international perspectives would be just as enhanced by nine or twelve hours of anthropology, or the regional studies offered in political science or geography.

Third, such a requirement would adversely impact an already-crowded curricula, at least in many instances, thus impacting time to degree. An intellectual benefit of the academy should be the opportunity of student exploration with greater choices, and this proposal

would diminish choices, unless we are now positioned to consider increasing the hourly requirement for degree to 128 hours or more. I know that students in the social science, teacher certification programs are already well beyond the 120 hours, as I suspect all teacher certification programs are.

Fourth, I have to wonder if this proposal would ultimately require additional foreign-language staff, an increasingly scarce resource that we are all competing for, and that we all can justify. The internationalization and globalization of the general education curriculum and an enhanced appreciation of cultural diversity could certainly occur with an increase in anthropological offerings, and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology could make a substantial contribution with the addition of several more anthropologists.

I have only sincere respect for those offering this proposal and for the integrity of the proposal itself, but if passed by CAA, I believe that it would come at some considerable impact, as identified above.

I am grateful for the work that CAA does, and I appreciate the opportunity to express my perspective on this proposal.