

TO: Members of CAA

RE: Foreign Language Requirement (proposed change)

FROM: College of Education and Professional Studies Curriculum Committee

DATE: March 26, 2008

Recently, the College of Education and Professional Studies Curriculum Committee invited Dr. Canfield to present the proposed change to the existing foreign language requirement. Given the foreign language requirement is embedded in general education requirements, the committee believes that a campus-wide discussion of this proposal is warranted. It appears that the proposal has been presented to several administrative constituencies, but general education requirements impact all of us.

After hearing the proposal, the committee expressed several concerns specific to the rationale, impact, recruitment and cost/resources.

Rationale

As per the proposal the rationale for the foreign language requirement change is as follows;

- Support and strengthen the mission statement of the university – “to reason and to communicate clearly so as to become responsible citizens of a diverse world.”
- Support and strengthen participation in study abroad programs.
- Support and strengthen the campus-wide push to internalize the curriculum.
- Increase enrollment in upper division foreign language courses.
- A change in the requirement brings EIU in alignment with the requirements of other state universities and peer institutions.

The proposal may support and strengthen the mission statement of the university and participation in study abroad programs, but there appears to be a lack of data to support this position. When students are studying abroad, are most of the students going to countries where the language spoken is one where they would benefit from a third semester of foreign language at the university level or an additional year of foreign language in secondary school? If so, how are those students currently functioning in those countries without an additional semester or additional coursework in foreign language?

In respect to increasing enrollment in upper division foreign language courses, the data are also lacking. According to Dr. Canfield, 50% of students move from FLS 2201 to FLS 2202 and of that 50% the majority of those students take at least one upper division course. Who are these students, are they students seeking majors and minors in foreign language or are they students who are wanting to further their skills in a specific foreign language?

Language requirements of other institutions were presented. If one looks at peer institutions, EIU is already in alignment with the majority of the institutions cited. In Illinois, we are currently in alignment with 50% of the institutions cited or in some cases exceed requirements.

Impact and Recruitment

The impact of the proposed change in the foreign language requirement reaches far beyond the student. The impact will target families, high schools, and community colleges across the state.

At the student level several concerns exist. While the impact is on both the native student and the transfer student, the most significant impact will be on the transfer students. Under the new proposal, 70% of transfer students will not meet the foreign language requirement compared to 33% of entering freshman. For those students, time to degree completion will be extended one semester to fulfill the foreign language requirement which equates to a significant increase in cost to the families. The extension of time to degree completion and additional cost may also result in families/students deciding to attend another university. How will enrollment be impacted? The Admissions Office may serve as assistance on this issue.

Another concern exists for those students who currently select sign language as the foreign language of choice. Under the new proposal, this option would be abolished as students can not get an additional semester of sign-language at a community college. Consequently, the only option may be a university such as ISU who has a deaf education program. In the College of Education and Professional Studies, numerous students utilize the sign language option as these are knowledge and skills they will use in their profession. The committee questions whether this proposal is sensitive to the needs of students who are acquiring a language to enhance their performance in the schools and agencies that they seek to work.

At the high school level, some rural areas do not have the resources to offer a third year of foreign language. For those students deciding to attend EIU, this would require them to take an additional semester to degree completion to fulfill the foreign language requirement. Similarly, at community colleges, resources may not be available to add an additional semester of foreign language. If the community college is capable of doing so, what does this do in respect to time to completion of the AA/AS degree?

Cost/Resources

The committee had several questions about the cost/resources of the proposed change. With college and program budgets being tight, where will the additional dollars come from to hire faculty to address the increase in foreign language enrollment? How will the priority of resource allocation be determined when there are numerous programs trying to make due with less?