

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT
FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Blair M. Lord
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Phone - 581-2121
Email - Blord@eiu.edu

TO: Christie Roszkowski, Chair, CAA
RE: Foreign Language Requirement
DATE: April 30, 2008

As you know, President Perry has accepted my recommendation and returned the proposed changes in the foreign language requirement to the Council on Academic Affairs for further discussion and consideration. Clearly, this change would be a significant one for the University, especially so because it would make us unique among the public institutions in Illinois including the University of Illinois. Unique can be very good and there is certainly nothing wrong with aspiring for higher levels of attainment in language skills or other academic disciplines; however, we must be attentive to the secondary effects and unintended consequences of any change of this magnitude.

The President has asked me, therefore, to work with the Council to define and address the issues this change would raise. Among them are the following: A careful examination of the data for 2006 indicates that 55% of new freshmen and 73% of new transfers would not meet this requirement. This would amount to 1763 students who would need at least one additional foreign language course. One year of data is not sufficient, of course, on which to base decisions. In time, students alert to the change may complete three years of foreign language in high school. However, these data suggest more study is needed. In addition, we must be cognizant of the fact that among all the academic initiatives we may wish to undertake, some choices will have to be made. Certainly, the resource needs of this requirement must be carefully assessed.

We also must recognize that over a third of our new students each year are transfer students. The impact on this cohort of students on which we depend greatly now and are likely to depend even more in the future needs to be more thoroughly considered. Similarly, we have worked very hard to diversify our campus. To what degree would this change affect our efforts to continue diversifying the campus further?

I also would note that different degree programs have different levels of flexibility within them. Currently, our average number of credits earned to degree stands at 136. While education programs all have more than the traditional 120 credit hours, this figure is still relatively high. Would the proposed change add to this already high average?

Finally, I would note that addressing these issues might suggest alternatives to a single foreign

language requirement for all degree programs. For example, might participation in a study abroad program at some level count toward meeting this requirement for some programs? Are there other means of satisfying a requirement like this that would be appropriate for some programs?

I would ask the Council to examine these and other matters that I will share with the Council. Thank you for your hard work on all matters before the Council.

cc. W.L. Perry
Council of Deans