

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS'
FOREIGN LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE
SUBMITTED NOVEMBER 6, 2008

PREFACE

The committee's members were the elected CAA representatives of the four academic colleges, the representative of the academic advisers, and a CAA student member. The committee interpreted as its charge from CAA to being to review the implications involved in implementation of the foreign language requirement effective Fall 2010 approved by CAA April 17, 2008. The committee resolved to complete its task and submit a report and recommendation with rationale to CAA by November 6. Members resolved to objectively approach this assignment with an open mind and with the intent of identifying and serving the overall best interests of the university while promoting high academic standards and values. Beginning September 11, the committee met weekly to receive information and comments. Mary Herrington-Perry provided data and information requested by the committee.

The committee also considered the implications of again considering an issue that was recently approved by the council, and the possibility that this could be cited as a precedent in the future. The committee concluded that the process through which the requirement was approved was appropriate. Foreign Languages appropriately consulted with all who could have been affected and made a case to the council that was more persuasive to a majority of the members present. That vote came after being on the agenda for a reasonable period of time that provided sufficient time for comment. However, this requirement is unique in that the president, on the advice of provost/vice president for academic affairs, notified the council that he could not approve the requirement, although he did not disapprove it. Rarely has a university president declined to approve an action of the council. In encouraging the council to reconsider it, the actions of the president and provost are consistent with the principle of shared governance. Thus, the committee determined that in this case, it is appropriate that the council review its action on this issue.

REPORT

All constituencies that had expressed an interest in or were from offices and programs that were affected by the foreign language requirement were invited to designate representatives to meet with the ad hoc committee and/or send written comments or other information. Those invited to send representatives included the Department of Foreign Languages, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, college curriculum committees, Career Services, Transfer Relations, Admissions, Council of Deans, Off Campus Programs, Study Abroad, International Programs, Continuing Education, Council of Chairs, Faculty Senate, Student Senate, and Council on Teacher Education. With the exception of the Student Senate, all responded by sending one or more representatives. Members of several groups also sent written comments. Mary Herrington-Perry served as the committee's liaison to administrative offices and arranged for the provision of data and information when requested.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

(1) The foreign language requirement ad hoc committee recommends approval by the Council for Academic Affairs of the following motion.

“The Council for Academic Affairs rescinds its approval of Agenda Item 08-35, approved April 17, 2008, that changes foreign language requirements for graduation.”

(2) If that motion is approved, the ad hoc committee recommends approval by the Council for Academic Affairs of the following resolution.

“The Council for Academic Affairs encourages each academic program offering a major, especially those with a significant international focus, to identify by April 1, 2009, the needs of graduates for foreign language proficiency, study abroad, and cultural awareness and to describe how those needs are being met in the current curriculum or to submit proposed curricular and programmatic changes that do so.”

RATIONALE

The ad hoc committee found most of the arguments for and against the requirement worthy of consideration. As the committee considered the pros and cons of the requirement, members sought to balance those considerations in arriving at the motions being presented to the council.

Major arguments for the requirement:

- Although English is the de facto language of international business and students in many developed nations are taught from early in their education to speak more than one language, most Americans are not fluent in a language other than English. This may limit opportunities for career placement and advancement.
- Several academic majors and programs have a global component or emphasis or prepare students for careers in which foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness are important and/or expand career opportunities.
- Research studies indicate that students who speak more than one language tend to have higher scores on standardized tests in reading, language arts and mathematics and are better able to formulate scientific hypotheses and solve science problems and apply these skills with aspects of linguistic competence.
- Strong foreign language courses integrate cultural awareness into the study of the language.
- Foreign language study encourages students to participate in study abroad programs and expands the places where they can do so, or to participate in faculty-led short term study abroad programs that may later prompt them to spend a semester or longer abroad. This advances President Perry’s goals for the university.
- The requirement would be beneficial to students seeking degrees in academic programs that can integrate it without adverse effects on time to degree or program accreditation.

Major arguments against the requirement:

- Foreign Languages is commended for having made a strong case for this requirement and taking the initiative over a period of time to bring it to CAA. "However, it has not been proved that the need for more foreign language is

greater than the need for more courses emphasizing such skills as greater proficiency in writing, critical thinking, and mathematics."

- At a time when student recruitment and retention are now more essential than ever to meeting the university's financial obligations and its commitment to keep student costs as low as possible, this requirement would likely place EIU at an unacceptable disadvantage. Lower enrollment and retention would have dire consequences, including inadequate funding to maintain, much less improve, academic quality in all programs.
- While there are compelling reasons for this requirement in some academic majors and programs, it creates substantial problems when required for all undergraduate majors and programs.
- Implementation of this requirement will require a reallocation of resources (classroom and office space, faculty, and technology) from other academic programs and units, adversely affecting their quality.
- It is not clear that for most students this requirement will result in a significantly higher level of foreign language fluency or proficiency or that this level is sufficient to prepare them for the workplace.
- Those who have not studied a foreign language recently, especially non-traditional students, would not be prepared to successfully fulfill this requirement without additional remedial or refresher courses that would expand the time to degree and additional cost.
- Many students seeking science, education, applied science, professional studies, and business degrees would be adversely affected if this requirement causes them to spend more time and incur greater expense to complete the degree and extends the date when they enter the workplace and become wage earners.
- It is not clear that the foreign languages courses currently offered in high schools from which many EIU students graduate are of equal or comparable quality. Also, it is not clear that the languages now being taught in the high schools and at EIU are those that will best serve the future needs of graduates in a fast-changing global environment where more and different languages are used.