

Academic Standards Committee

Proposal to Senate – October 4, 2023

Ruling on the creation of a policy regarding Foreign Language (FL) requirements for BA degrees.

find the request, rationale and committee's responses below:

1. Request and Background

Request made by Dr. Mary Beth Earnhardt to establish a clear policy detailing a foreign language requirement for the BA degree.

Initial investigations on a FL requirement for BA degrees during the 2022-23 academic year revealed that:

- No clear campus wide policy exists to determine the inclusion or exclusion of a FL requirement within the BA degree.
- Early evidence policies on the BA degree requirement predate the transition from quarters to semesters.
- Iterative, small, campus wide changes to the academic division over several decades did not impact the requirement of a FL but a formal language on policy was never carried through.
- In 2012 Senate passed a resolution that FL did not need to be a requirement of a BS degree – note that Math has maintained it as a requirement.
- Lack of clear language on a FL policy led to several differing assumptions on ruling of the FL requirement. Assumptions included it was campus wide requirement others conditioned that it was ruled at the college level.
- COVID era Academic Division reorganization brought to light the lack of a clear policy jurisdiction regarding FL for the BA degree, when the Communication major (which moved colleges from Fine and Performing Arts to the Williamson College of Business Administration) sought to make changes to its degree program.

2. Recommended Policy:

1. The decision regarding requiring a foreign language within a BA degree rests at the program level based on industry standards and other factors recognized by the faculty content experts within the program.
2. Individual Colleges will be responsible for ensuring that program changes and the needs of the degree seeking students are met regarding foreign language. Policy written at the College level should allow programs to be self-determining and stay flexible with changing external conditions related to industry and societal needs.
3. That YSU maintain a healthy and resilient foreign language program:
 - To ensure that all academic programs requiring Foreign Language and students electing to study a specific foreign language are able to meet their needs unimpeded; resulting in successful achievement of academic, personal and professional goals in a timely manner.
 - So YSU retains agility to adapt to the coming shifts associated with in demand interpersonal communication, logic, critical thinking and skills achieved through the study of a foreign language. Doing so keeps YSU dynamically attractive place and resource for current and future students, high quality faculty, the community it serves and employers.

4. That YSU maintains healthy and resilient academic programs though maintaining program diversity opinions that meet societal and citizen needs.
 - Doing so best ensures the stability and viability of the academy as a public institution of Ohio.

3. Background from Communications Program faculty:

When we started our curriculum revision 26 months ago, we were exploring our options, including whether to pursue a BS degree rather than a BA. We had ongoing concerns about the foreign language requirement. As we tracked our student success data, we saw cases where students were struggling, dropping out, or going elsewhere for their language classes. Based on our conversations and reading of the YSU current catalog and past editions, BOT policies, and ODHE requirements, we believed the decision on whether to require a language resided at the college level rather. This research included the following points:

For the past 23 years, the Catalog description of a language requirement has mostly been on the college pages related to specific BA degrees. The exception is a statement on the [Placement Testing](#) page. This page, however, seems to be out of date for several reasons, including that it refers to the A.B. degree rather than a BA and that the link for more information on the language requirements leads to a "page not found" error.

The Board of Trustee policies surrounding Academic Affairs in general and degree requirements in particular do not mention a language requirement for a B.A. - <https://ysu.edu/human-resources/university-policies/policies-number/10-academic-affairs>

The ODHE does not explicitly state that BA programs require a foreign language - <https://highered.ohio.gov/educators/academic-programs-policies>. Other universities in the state, including the BA in Communication at Kent State University do not require a foreign language.

The university is not investing in foreign language education. Several languages, including French, have been cut. The only elementary language courses offered in Fall 2023 are ASL (2 sections), Italian (2 sections), and Spanish (7 sections).

As we track student success, the language requirement is a barrier to student graduation. There are not many options. Students who have studied French in high school can't continue this language at YSU. The four-hour courses make it difficult to schedule other courses. Students will often turn to other resources like Eastern Gateway or Straighterline to fulfill the requirement. This isn't meant as a criticism of the World Languages curriculum or faculty. It is just a reflection of the university not investing in languages.

As part of our curriculum redesign, we talked to employers and evaluated other Communication/Media/Journalism programs. The employers we spoke to don't require a second language and there isn't a standard requirement within the disciplines.

For these reasons and the uncertainty regarding whether this is a college- or university-level decision, we moved forward with our current proposal based on the advice of our dean at the time, Betty Jo Licata. We voted as a department and unanimously supported dropping the language requirement for the Communication Studies, Multimedia Communication, and Journalism programs. All of our programs have enough free electives, so that students MAY complete a foreign language and remain on track to graduate with 120 hours. If necessary, we are comfortable with putting the language in as an option and/or advising students to take a language, but not making it a requirement for graduation.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our perspective on this issue. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions. I'm happy to talk about the background and our research on this topic.

4. Rational for policy -

1. The decision regarding a foreign language within a BA degree rests at the program level based on industry standards and other factors recognized by the faculty content experts within the program.
2. Individual Colleges will be responsible for ensuring that program changes and the needs of the degree seeking students are met regarding foreign language. Policy written at the College level should allow programs to be self-determining and stay flexible with changing external conditions related to industry and societal needs.

Whereas:

- A managing policy at the university or college level regarding FL is unduly restrictive. The ability to efficiently address program changes and onboard emerging programs will result in a lag in response time. This can impact the ability for YSU to successfully onboard students and streamline programs.
 - It impinges on the autonomy of the faculty who are content experts in the subject area best and know the programs of sister programs.
 - Future reconfigurations of colleges and programs is costly in time and energy. Policy changes between the program and college allow for rapid adoption to meet changing conditions.
 - Such that:
 - Program decisions are maintained at the program level.
 - The college is entrusted to ensure that the programs are dynamic and flexible in meeting necessary changes in maintaining viability.
3. That YSU maintain a healthy and resilient foreign language program:
 - To ensure that all academic programs requiring Foreign Language and students electing to study a specific foreign language are able to meet their needs unimpeded; resulting in successful achievement of academic, personal and professional goals in a timely manner.
 - So YSU retains agility to adapt to the coming shifts associated with in demand interpersonal communication, logic, critical thinking and skills achieved through the study of a foreign language. Doing so keeps YSU dynamically attractive place and resource for current and future students, high quality faculty, the community it serves and employers.
 4. That YSU maintains healthy and resilient academic programs though maintaining program diversity opinions that meet societal and citizen needs.
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Whereas:

- The institution must remain resilient and viable to all current and future students and the communities it serves.
- Where true resiliency is maintained by ensuring the following conditions are intact:
 - Maintaining high diversity and redundancy
 - Like a true ecosystem keeping these two elements in place allows the system to adjust to changes with minimal impact to the system, as changes occur in small increments at low energetic and monetary costs. This occurs because there are more viable options available for adaptation. YSU will not need to build or rebuild entire programs from scratch as the base units are in place for transitioning.
 - Where courses and programs across YSU each maintain novel ways of problem solving and understanding. Diversifying these bodies of knowledge and skills for students ensures their resiliency and better supports the systems they will work and live within. Such that foreign language requirements for non-majors, majors and minors:
 - Develop a basis of communication and cultural understanding of “others” regardless of the language learned.
 - Build communication skills that begin with empathy and curiosity, which are bridges to creating relationships.

- Develop pattern recognition ability that is transferable to other areas of utility.
- Develops unique sets of critical thinking skills from other academic disciplines.
- Other variables of resiliency include:
 - Maintaining connectivity
 - Creates connections between programs that provides degree creation options for students to adapt and create career paths that are distinct and versatile to evolving career and personal interests.
 - Without connections to foreign language options many career paths are closed off to students. - see list of features that knowing a foreign language develops in individuals above.
 - Fosters complex adaptive systems thinking
 - Complex and adaptive thinking in individuals does not emerge though singular disciplines. One needs to combine different ways of thinking to generate new ways of thinking.
 - Consider that Math has maintained a foreign language requirement because the program faculty understands that knowing a foreign language makes math majors better mathematicians.
 - Encourage learning
 - Without challenging our students to do what they find difficult we are not creating resiliency in them. Nurturing students' recognition of their own ability strive and succeed with a challenge:
 - Bolsters self confidence
 - Creates new pathways of resilience within their patterns of thinking
 - Broaden participation
 - Creating participation across campus fosters community and mutual wellbeing of its members.
 - Engagement with other disciplines develops an understanding of the value of those disciplines.
 - Student participation in studying foreign languages and other diverse course work helps create tools to participate in multiple areas of society.
 - Promote polycentric governance systems
 - Governance (policies) at the program-college interface reflects the diversity and uniqueness of programs. Consequently, allowing for accurate policy creation that reflects and better serves the unique features of programs.

5. Academic Standards Committee Members Comments concerning foreign language.

Some members of this committee note the intellectual importance of having a foreign language as part of either a BA degree or both a BA and BS degrees. The primary charge of a university is to advance intellect. Learning a foreign language is a critical element in expanding intellect and critical thinking. Studying a language includes benefits beyond becoming fluent. Reasons for learning a foreign language include but are not limited to the development of codification and code-switching skills, enhanced and quicker problem-solving skills, better listening skills and memory, and social and business aptitude enhancement, and improved cognition with deep learning that comes from emotive experiences that language brings forward. Because language is integrated in human biology, these are deep skills that are obtained intrinsically through the process of learning a language.

With the lens on creating a workforce ready population through university degrees it is often overlooked that intellectual development is critical to the workforce. Several traditional sectors of employment that require intellect include government agencies, law, urban design and architecture, education and social work and more. As technological progress continues to push into new fields, the “worker” will be called upon to be more resourceful in recognizing occurrences and processes, as well as opportunity recognition and problem solving. This means creating a university that diversifies its course and degree offerings so that students can combine ways of thinking and knowing that address future conditions. As the saying goes you cannot solve a problem with the same logic that created it. Loss of understanding fundamental human conditions through the study of language will truncate students' ability to seek understanding and solutions through base human conditions. As technology advances the importance of human wellbeing will elevate. Together this emerging combination will require the workforce to marry the skills from language, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts with STEM and Business.