

# Not Your Parents' Language Class: Curriculum Revision to Support University Language Requirements

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**Abstract:** *Indiana State University's (ISU) foreign language requirement curriculum serves as a model for the 21st century. Unique to the program is an emphasis on integrating the common goals of general education and multicultural studies with the development of critical thinking skills to reach overall objectives of communicative competency, cultural awareness, sensitivity to diversity, and a holistic application of strategies and skills for lifelong learning. This article traces the process of curricular development (outcomes standards, statement of course pedagogy, and course requirements) and program implementation. Of particular interest is the expanded use of learning journals. A comprehensive assessment program is also outlined. Early feedback indicates that the program is meeting its goals and is favorably received by students.*

## Introduction

In the fall of 1999 the Indiana State University (ISU) faculty voted to adopt a campus-wide foreign language requirement for all incoming students. The decision was the culmination of several years of work by the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics to convince the university community that a return to a university language requirement was an absolute necessity to a liberal education in the 21st century. The battle was won with the promise that this would not be “your parents’ foreign language course.”

We recognized that a requirement would only succeed if its goals were strategically tied to the mission of the university and the curriculum integrated into the fabric of the university's General Education Program.<sup>1</sup> Citing the university's strategic goal of “enhancement and advocacy of multicultural and international values,” we claimed that we could provide a learning experience where students would gain the basic practical skills and cultural knowledge necessary for a multicultural world through language (ISU Strategic Plan, 1994). But further, we offered to design a curriculum that would consciously complement the multicultural studies component of the university's General Education Program by preparing students to interact with other cultures with a degree of awareness and sensitivity. Our experience suggested that the challenge of the 21st century for institutions with foreign language requirements—and those who hope to keep or reinstate them—will be how to deliver a curriculum that is both responsive to

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the needs of a changing academic landscape and integrated into students' greater academic experience.

The discussions surrounding the foreign language requirement at ISU were hardly different from those conducted historically in the United States. Since the 1960s, when university foreign language requirements were widely repealed, many have debated the efficacy of foreign language requirements.<sup>2</sup> The importance of foreign language study to the traditional concept of liberal education has been continually defended. Recent support for requirements has expanded to focus on the pragmatic application of foreign language study for professional, business, and private use (Dusel, 1970; Rogers & Arn, 1998; Turner, 1974; Arendt, Lange & Wakefield, 1986). Detractors of foreign language requirements have not challenged the value of language study per se, but rather the "unattainable, unrealistic goals" at the basis of such requirements (Klayman, 1978, p. 236). Further, they have claimed that traditional foreign language courses have not fulfilled promises inherent in the goals of requirements: to produce internationally competent students (Pankenier, 1990, p. 1). There are other compelling critiques of foreign language requirements that must be acknowledged as well, such as claims that forcing unmotivated students to submit to requirements impeded the success of those who are intrinsically motivated (Brewer, 1998), that certain student populations are put at risk for failure by a requirement (Shaw, 1999), or more boldly, that requirements were simply a "transparent attempt to maintain enrollment for foreign language staff" (Klayman, 1978, p. 238).<sup>3</sup> Any attempt to redesign curriculum for a requirement had to be mindful of such critiques. The extreme case of Drake University, where the foreign language program was cut in favor of study abroad options, suggested that failure to respond to criticism and be proactive in adapting curricula to changing academic needs could be deadly (Schneider, 2001).

Debates about requirements forced us to look at what was being claimed for foreign language study. In an increasingly interconnected world, the defense of foreign language study lay not just with the importance of communicative skills for ensuring individual and national success, but also with the necessity of cultural awareness and sensitivity for interacting with other cultural and linguistic groups. Our approach to designing a new foreign language curriculum began with a reexamination of the relationship between foreign language study and multicultural studies within our General Education Program. We recognized that the spread of multicultural studies across academic disciplines was paving the way for the renewed efficacy of foreign language study, for in fact, much of what we claim for language study—namely the development of cultural awareness and sensitivity—also lies within the interdisciplinary area of multicultural studies. We sought to examine the way multicultural studies and language study have common aspirations, to demonstrate the ways in which foreign

language study could complement the multicultural studies curriculum, and to find ways to integrate multicultural studies effectively into the foreign language classroom.

### *ISU Case Study*

Our experience at ISU has been that a successful foreign language requirement depended on our ability to bridge disciplinary chasms to produce what all sides agree are reasonable requirements and outcomes—namely, a student who has gained a rudimentary understanding and use of language structure and function, who has been exposed to the relationship between culture and language, and who has begun to view her/his own culture critically through the study of another language and culture. This has required a shift in the traditional understanding of beginning foreign language classes as foundational for the major/minor-track foreign language curriculum. We concur with Oukada's argument that the "general education phase" of the language curriculum—by its very nature as part of a university requirement—ought to have different goals than the "professional phase" (Oukada, 2001). We found that in carefully matching the curriculum to the goals for the university's General Education Program and multicultural studies, some of the past deficits of foreign language requirement curricula could be overcome.

Previous foreign language requirements at ISU were limited to the four semesters required for the Bachelor of Arts degree. The compromise agreement reached was a new requirement targeting students with little or no previous background in foreign language study. Students with two years of a single foreign language in high school with a grade of C or better had already fulfilled the requirement.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the target audience for the requirement (students with either no, limited, or unsuccessful experience studying a foreign language) necessitated a shift in instructional goals. These courses would serve truly different populations and needs.

The students attending ISU are overwhelmingly first-generation college students from families of mid to low income (64% according to statistics for 2001). The majority of them come from within a 50-mile radius of Terre Haute, a city of 65,000 that has struggled economically since the 1960s. Yet, for many students from the rural and small-town surrounding areas, Terre Haute is the "big city." Economic and demographic factors suggest that awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity are important needs of this population, and thus must influence curricular decision making.<sup>5</sup> Our goal of integrating multicultural studies and foreign language study seemed ideally suited to reach a targeted population of students with limited experience among diverse populations.<sup>6</sup>

A second factor that contributed to a necessary shift in goals came from the specific academic structures under which the new foreign language requirement is housed. As a requirement of the General Education Program, the

courses were subject to review and assessment by the General Education Council, the program's coordinating body. Goals of the specific General Education Program and of the current best practice within general education would need to be integrated into the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the department's working group charged with designing the new curriculum strove to combine the goals of communicative language proficiency with those of multicultural studies and general education.

### Program Development and Implementation

With the new goals in mind, a working group of volunteers was organized to design and develop a curriculum and assessment tools. Its chief charge was to formulate departmental standards that would encompass common objectives, yet allow for the differences among the languages in the department. The working group was composed of tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct faculty from French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish, working democratically so that all language representatives had an equal voice.<sup>8</sup> In this way, we ensured that each language area was invested in the new program. Further, in creating the departmental standards, the working group allowed for flexibility in cultural and skill-related goals among languages—especially for the classical languages and for languages with non-Roman scripts—as they formed expectations regarding language proficiency outcomes.

The working group considered the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1996), the draft *State of Indiana Foreign Language Standards Implementation Guide* (1999), and the common goals of ISU's General Education Program. It also consulted research in multicultural studies and critical thinking development.<sup>9</sup> The following areas for the departmental standards were then adopted: communicative skills, cultural awareness, diversity, sensitivity and holistic approach. While these areas closely modeled national and Indiana K–12 guidelines, the ISU standards clearly showed an emphasis that reflected ISU's General Education Program common goals. (See Table 1 for a complete explanation of the ISU standards for basic studies courses in language. A detailed description of the standards adopted follows).<sup>10</sup>

#### ISU Standards

Taking into consideration criticism that language requirements fail to produce competent speakers of the target language, as well as students' stated goals to be able to speak the language, the committee approached ISU's "communicative skills" standard from a proficiency standpoint.<sup>11</sup> While the goal was indeed to develop all four skills, the stated outcomes suggested developing skills within a range of expected

competencies, with oral communication receiving special attention.<sup>12</sup> Our goal for communicative skills stated, "Students demonstrate understanding and/or expression of meaning through listening, speaking, reading, and writing using appropriate grammar and vocabulary." Significantly, the curriculum aimed for students' use of the spoken language to "obtain information, express needs, feelings, opinions, and engage in basic conversation on topics related to functional needs and personal interests."<sup>13</sup> This was a realistic goal for most beginning-level students.

The "cultural awareness" standard integrated aspects of the national standards for culture and comparisons, stating, "Students critically examine issues of cultural differences, societal values, and relationships, and critically evaluate their own culture and value systems through comparison and contrast to the target language and culture." ISU's "diversity sensitivity" standard related language study to its commonality with multicultural studies, inviting students to examine prejudice toward the target language and target culture and to develop a more accepting attitude about differences. The standard succinctly stated, "Students develop openness, sensitivity, and tolerance toward other languages and cultures." These two standards taken together formed the backbone of the program's integration into the General Education Program.

Finally, the standard of "holistic application" charged students to use their knowledge about language and culture to enrich their current studies and to develop lifelong skills. It was here that the program sought to promote the lifelong learning disposition and to establish connections with other disciplines and communities.

#### Course Pedagogy

Although the setting of common departmental standards across languages was a unique task for a language department, it was not the only task. The committee undertook the task of developing sample syllabi, lesson plans, textbook adoption guidelines, and assessment tools. Through a shared process, each language representative reformulated syllabi to meet the new goals. Deliberate efforts were made to use welcoming, nonthreatening language and to address the needs of reluctant learners by providing more guidance and reassurance.<sup>14</sup> Just as with the departmental standards and outcome goals themselves, the syllabi allowed for instructional freedom with a uniformity of purpose.

Even with common standards and user-friendly syllabi in use, stylistic, methodological, and generational differences combined with individual language features can create vast differences in teaching approaches. Therefore, we felt it imperative to develop a "Statement of Course Pedagogy."<sup>15</sup> This statement also provided written documentation for foreign language requirement foes that "this was not your parents' foreign language course."

Of paramount importance was the need for a

**Table 1**

## STANDARDS FOR BASIC STUDIES FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES FINAL VERSION 2001

*Communicative Skills (CS)*

Students demonstrate understanding and/or expression of meaning through listening, speaking, reading, and writing using appropriate grammar and vocabulary.\*

- CS 1.1 Students are able to use spoken language to obtain information, express needs, feelings, opinions, and engage in basic conversation on topics related to functional needs and personal interests.
- CS 1.2 Students are able to understand sentence-length utterances on topics related to functional needs and personal interests.
- CS 1.3 Students demonstrate global comprehension of authentic texts related to functional needs and personal interests.
- CS 1.4 Students are able to use written language to fulfill specific simple tasks related to functional needs and personal interests.

*Cultural Awareness (CA)*

Students critically examine issues of cultural differences, societal values and relationships, and critically evaluate their own culture and value systems through comparison and contrast to the target language and culture(s).

- CA 2.1 Students demonstrate awareness of uniqueness of target culture(s) in its practices, perspectives, and products.
- CA 2.2 Students reflect on and compare own culture with target culture with evidence of developing critical thinking skills.

*Diversity (D)*

Students develop openness, sensitivity, and tolerance toward other languages and culture(s).

- D 3.1 Students consider personal and societal prejudice beginning with the target language and culture(s) with evidence of developing critical thinking
- D 3.2 Students show evidence of applying sensitivity to cultural and language diversity beyond the classroom in the campus and civic community.

*Holistic Application (HA)*

Through these Basic Studies courses, students will use the target language to develop knowledge and learning skills as a foundation for building a successful academic career and for relating disciplines to one another. This provides a springboard to lifelong learning.

- HA 4.1 Students relate their knowledge of other disciplines with the target language and culture.
- HA 4.2 Students demonstrate skills in gathering and evaluating information, through library resources and technological media, about the target language and culture(s).
- HA 4.3 Students give presentations drawing on other disciplines and demonstrating knowledge of the target language and culture(s).
- HA 4.4 Students develop and apply learning strategies and study habits appropriate both to the study of languages and cultures and to other disciplines.
- HA 4.5 Students demonstrate evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment, enrichment, and adaptation to a multilingual U.S. and global community.

\*In classical languages, the emphasis on skills will proceed from reading and writing to speaking and listening, with less weight on the latter two skills.

proficiency-oriented approach with student-centered lessons. A student-centered pedagogy stresses the use of a variety of approaches to engage the multiple-learning styles of students. We also realized that for affective and pedagogical reasons, the use of technology would continue to be important in the classroom setting, and both the language

lab and the Internet should regularly be used for out-of-class assignments. Instructors were charged with selecting textbooks that maximized appropriate technology. Ancillary materials varied by language, but included listening activities available through the real or virtual lab, CD-ROM activities, and video accompaniments. Finally,

mirroring ACTFL's Standard 1.1, the departmental holistic application standard necessitated a requirement that all students give at least one presentation to demonstrate research skills and knowledge of the target cultures and/or language.

### *Course Requirements*

With the departmental standards and pedagogy statement in mind, the working group created a framework to ensure that certain learning experiences took place in each course and to provide means for assessment. Shared requirements across the languages included an oral presentation, language learning journals, oral interviews, and a common exam format. The oral presentation constituted 10% of the final grade and learning journals 5%, with the point distribution of other components determined by individual languages.

**Oral presentations.** The oral presentation sought to develop and measure four aspects of the departmental holistic application standard. First, the presentation was envisioned as a tool for promoting students' research skills, including familiarization with the campus library, and thus, no more than half of students' sources could be from the Internet (HA Standard 4.2). Second, it provided a forum for cultural discussion on topics not addressed in the text and encouraged students to relate their knowledge of other disciplines with the target language and target culture when possible (HA Standard 4.1). Third, students practiced a lifelong learning skill of public speaking (HA Standard 4.5). Fourth, in the case of oral presentations in the second semester of language study (102), students demonstrated the ability to communicate a message in the target language in a formal, presentational style (HA Standard 4.3).

In their first semester of language study (101), students selected a culturally related topic, preferably one of a cross-disciplinary nature, and presented a five-minute speech in English. During the second semester (102), students gave a five-minute speech in the target language, ideally on a different topic than in the first semester. Because limited vocabulary naturally restricted the range of topics, instructors were encouraged to provide a list of suggestions. Other instructors adopted a project approach, challenging students to act as tour guides of assigned countries or regions. To facilitate comprehension by the audience, students were limited to a designated number of new vocabulary words. Sample grading rubrics were provided for the instructors, and students were given these rubrics in advance so that they might better understand the evaluation process.

**Learning journals.** The learning journal, written in English, promotes student metacognitive and affective reflection on the process of language and culture learning.<sup>16</sup> Oxford (1990, p. 168) defined this critical thinking tool as "narratives describing the learners' feelings,

attitudes, and perceptions about the language learning process. They can also include specific information about strategies which learners find effective or ineffective for each of the four language skills." Oxford's categories of metacognitive strategies include (1) arranging and planning learning and (2) evaluating learning. At ISU, students began the semester and their journal by "planning learning" in response to a question that asked them to set goals for the course. Students evaluated their learning as an ongoing process: At midterm and semester end they were asked to determine whether they were reaching or had reached their goals. Questions regularly sought to address different types of metacognitive or affective strategies, with some journal questions specifically asking students to describe their study practices and the language learning strategies that they were developing. The journals thus provided a means for instructors to learn more about student needs, plan interventions where necessary, and encourage cross-disciplinary strategy use. This was especially important in the case of students with fears, past failure, or certain learning disabilities.

While the learning journal provided a forum for metacognitive thinking about the language learning process, it also allowed expressions of personal belief and feelings about emotionally charged issues regarding the culture learning process. Regarding the development of students' critical thinking, Barell (1991, p. 266) wrote, "Too often we don't realize that for successful, significant change [in thinking] to occur, we engage not only materials and strategies but also our belief systems, our values, and the whole range of our emotions and attitudes." Journal questions were strategically designed to mark students' initial perceptions of the target culture and chart their development throughout the semester (CA Standards 2.1). An early question asked, "How might someone from your community describe a typical speaker of the language, whatever typical means to you? Do you know any native speakers of the target language or have you had any personal contacts that would lead you to agree or disagree with the general description above?" (D Standard 3.1). The question for second-semester students was similar, but challenged them to consider the source of their perceptions and the media's impact on them. As students learned of cultural values and perspectives different than their own, the learning journal questions challenged them to do more than tuck away the information as cultural tidbits and oddities. In week seven they were asked, "Have you found yourself thinking about a new perspective or different value system since you began the study of language and culture in this class? Describe your thinking." (CA Standards 2.2, 2.3) Finally, in preparation for the final exam, students were asked to consider their progress in diversity sensitivity with the journal question, "Now that you have been studying a new language for a semester, how might you react if you encountered a nonnative speaker of

English who needed help? Would you have responded this way before taking this class? If you would have, how might the encounter be different than before?" (D Standard 3.2, HA Standard 4.5) (See Appendix A for a partial list of learning journal questions.)

Brookfield (1995) stated that for students to take learning journals seriously, learners must: (1) be given some specific guidelines on what a learning journal should look like, (2) be convinced that keeping a journal is in their own best interests, and (3) be publicly acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts. Students received guidance from instructors during the first week of class and received an explanation sheet, and a grading rubric. The explanation sheet provided a rationale for student participation in journal writing. (See Appendix B for the grading rubric). Students answered journal questions each week, but instructors responded to the entries biweekly. Depending on instructor preference, journals took the form of email messages, entries in "blue books," or single sheets of paper which students placed into a folder. Following the rubric guidelines, the instructors graded each week's entry and briefly responded to students' comments in a manner that questioned and pushed the students to take critical thinking to the next level. In class, instructors periodically affirmed students' voices by discussing themes and concerns expressed in the journals.

**Unified final exam format.** Each departmental standard was evaluated in the final exam. Common guidelines for final exams ensured that each language area's final assessment tool reflected the program standards. The exam guidelines were designed for flexibility within a point range and stipulated areas that had to be assessed. Sample formats of question types were given to instructors. The areas tested were divided into two groups: communicative skills and cultural skills. The division of these skill groups and their

percentage value are listed in Table 2. The cultural awareness section could contain factually oriented questions tested in a matching, multiple choice, or true–false manner and related to geography, the products and/or practices of the target culture (CA Standard 2.1). Questions could also include a short answer question that combined cultural perspectives and factual knowledge, such as, "Living is simply different in many ways in German-speaking countries. Explain what factors influence the German way of life (such as population density), and how it is different from the American way of life in some respects" (CA Standard 2.2). A week before the final exam, instructors gave students the exact wording of the diversity sensitivity and the holistic application questions. The last journal topic prepared students to think along the same lines, and students were specifically directed to past journal entries as a reference in preparing their answers. Just as the journal was written in English because sophistication in critical thinking and analysis was not yet possible in the target language, the final exam diversity and holistic approach questions were written in English and students responded in English. The final exam diversity question asked

What ideas, attitudes, and behaviors did you have toward [target language]-speaking peoples, their language, and their culture before this class? *and* How has the course changed or expanded your ideas/attitudes/behaviors? How has what you learned about [target culture] values and perspectives influenced the way that you look at other cultures? In what ways has the course made you more aware of [target culture]?

The holistic application question asked

First discuss the strategies and/or skills developed during the language learning process in this

**Table 2**

UNIFIED FINAL EXAM FORMAT ASSESSMENT PERCENTAGES

Communicative Skills	Percentage Value	Cultural Skills	Percentage Value
Speaking	10	Cultural Awareness	10–15
Listening	10–15	Diversity Sensitivity	5
Grammar/ Structure	25–35	Holistic Application	5
Writing	8–10		
Reading	8–10		

course which may have influenced your learning in other subjects on campus this semester or may have prepared you for other subjects in the future. *Then* describe a possible setting in which you might apply your new cultural and language knowledge for your present or future enjoyment or your own enrichment.

Because of the subjective nature of the diversity and holistic questions, a rubric for grading was provided for instructors (see Appendix C). Ideal responses addressed all aspects of the prompt and communicated ideas well, in addition to showing evidence of reflection on the learning process, diversity sensitivity and critical thinking, such as specific details and analysis of the details given (CA Standards 2.1, 2.2, 2.3; D 3.1, 3.2, HA 4.1, 4.4, 4.5).

**Oral interview.** In the final journal entry and final exam, students regularly cited an increase in their willingness to approach, assist, and converse with native speakers of the target language. Part of the reason for this willingness may have been the confidence gained through the oral interview. Throughout the semester, instructors developed and informally assessed conversational skills in the target language. The oral interview served as a type of final oral production exam to measure spontaneous linguistic and sociolinguistic proficiency in informal situations that mirrored real-life contexts. Although students were using the target language, its purpose and language register varied greatly from the oral presentation (CS Standards 1.1, 1.2).

To demonstrate mastery of the communication standard before exiting the program, in the last third of the second semester, each student met with a partner in the instructor's office. Before the interview, students were given a study guide with five possible scenarios that they could encounter and a list in English of helpful expressions that would help them to be successful in the interview. Determining which expressions most naturally fell into each scenario and practicing the given expressions in the target language was part of the student's preinterview task. During the interview a student drew one of five index cards, read the scenario to the partner, and began the questioning process to elicit the information listed on the card. Demonstrating two scenarios allowed both students to ask and respond to questions. The instructor's rating sheet provided space to transcribe the conversations, if desired. Instructors were given the option of asking students to complete a self-evaluation form after the oral interview. The reflections here and in the journals chronicled the growth in student confidence in oral communication.

### *Professional Development*

Asking language teaching professionals, as well as teaching assistants, to approach their courses with the broad goals of the new program in mind required financial support for

professional development. The General Education Program provided funding for yearly two-day workshops in which instructors new to the program as well as veteran instructors participated. The workshops included information about the student population served, the components of the new program, and recent assessment results. They also provided for topics of special interest, strategy sharing, time management ideas, and practice in lesson design and assessment. During the semester, program instructors met with coordinators on a monthly basis. These monthly meetings focused on specific aspects of the program or presented speakers on special topics (e.g., teaching culture critically or supporting students with learning disabilities). The monthly meetings also provided an opportunity for instructors to work together, to share ideas and frustrations, and to build an intellectual community. They further allowed the steering committee to get vital feedback from instructors about what worked in practice and what needed to be reevaluated.

### **Assessment**

As the new program was initiated, the working group was replaced by a steering committee chaired by a coordinator. The steering committee was responsible for assessing program outcomes and making modifications to the program as necessary. The steering committee continued the democratic impetus of the working group and included members representing many of the languages and different professional gradations (tenured, tenure-track, as well as adjunct).

The steering committee chose two primary program assessment tools: an anonymous student questionnaire and a standards assessment checklist. The student questionnaire was administered in the final weeks of each semester and asked students to reflect on the goals of the program and their perception of how well those goals were achieved in the course. Questions were both multiple choice and open ended. Different from a teaching evaluation, this questionnaire allowed the steering committee to analyze which aspects of the program were successful in students' eyes and which were less successful. It gave further information about student attitudes toward the foreign language requirement before taking the course and upon its completion. This information has proved to be a significant weapon in the continuing debate with requirement naysayers.

The standards assessment checklist was a modified portfolio tool in which student performance on required components of the course was assessed (see Appendix D). Instructors were asked to evaluate student performance at the end of the semester on the basis of whether students met, did not meet, or exceeded the goals prescribed in the departmental standards using the final exam, journals, presentations, and oral proficiency outcomes as indicators. The data compiled from the checklists were

used solely to assess overall student outcomes through the program and were not used to grade individual students.

### *The Importance of Critical Thinking*

An integral part of general education programs in recent years is the idea that students' critical thinking skills can and should be developed through courses in such programs. This is also a goal of multicultural studies. In a pioneering spirit, the working group introduced the concept of "cultural critical thinking" into beginning-level foreign language classes. While foreign language courses have always contained cultural components, the idea that cultural lessons should move beyond facts and neat tidbits toward development of critical thinking skills was a fundamental feature of the ISU program.

The shift in goals to include cultural critical thinking in a substantive way required planning on several fronts. First, it required professional development workshops (part of the ongoing workshop strategy) to train instructors in both the theoretical and practical applications of such approaches to culture teaching. Instructors were encouraged to view every cultural lesson in terms of a developmental approach. Therefore they asked themselves in what way study of a particular cultural component, and the methodological approach used to present it, contributed to the development of critical thinking skills and fostered critical discussions. Secondly, it required a consensus among faculty about the use of English during cultural discussions. While it was acknowledged that these courses should stress communicative proficiency in the target language, it was deemed unrealistic that real critical discussions of culture could take place in the target language, even in the second semester. Thus, instructors were guided to introduce culture components as much as possible in the target language, but not to shy away from weekly in-depth discussions in English. A third and crucial component was the use of learning journals. Since the journals were written in English, they became the primary venue for critical cultural discussions (in addition to their role in metacognitive reflection on the learning process). However, for journals to work effectively in this way, instructors needed to learn how to respond meaningfully to journal entries with prompts meant to guide students in the development of their critical thinking. (Appendix C gives an example of the kinds of guidelines given to instructors in grading for critical thinking development.) ISU has benefited from workshops by local favorite Craig Nelson (1998), who has applied the research of Perry and others on cognitive development to help identify levels of critical thinking in students and define teaching objectives. Further workshops focusing on creating lesson plans that promote critical thinking development, as well as access to university speakers and forums where this topic was discussed, were also

made available through the University's Center for Teaching and Learning.

### **Preliminary Results**

Preliminary assessment results from the first year of implementation (2000-2001) suggested that the new program was successful. Student outcomes according to the standards assessment checklist were encouraging. The failure rate was below what was typically the case in ISU's traditional beginning-level foreign language classroom, thus disputing the argument that requirements would automatically doom some students to failure. Final grade distributions were reasonable and generally consistent with past performance.

Student response to the program via the student questionnaires was very positive. Data indicated that students were pleased with the new course format. As Table 3 shows, the overwhelming majority of students expressed confidence in the further pursuit of language and culture study following the program; the percentage of students entering the program with negative expectations was low. Thus, the students do not appear to see the courses as meaningless requirements, and they were pleased with their progress. Table 4 suggests that students applauded the emphasis on communicative skills and the opportunities for critical reflection and discussion on cultural differences. The program focus on communication and cultural awareness as the key skills necessary for the 21st century appeared to resonate with students. It is telling that 43% of students responded to the open-ended question about what they found least valuable about the program with the positive response of "nothing" or "all was valuable" (see Table 5).

Also significant was the fact that the chairperson of the department did not receive the expected complaints about the requirement from students or parents. In fact, the chairperson found that parents of high school students who were concerned that the requirement would be an unnecessary obstacle to their child's academic success were relieved when they heard about the design of the new program. The misconception that foreign language study is only for the gifted student and would unfairly penalize average students was dispelled by a multidisciplinary approach that emphasized holistic learning.

The steering committee has not been naive about the kinds of gains to be made in diversity sensitivity, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills in the span of two semesters. However, preliminary results were indeed encouraging. Journals and final exam results did show increased awareness and sensitivity, as well as student willingness to apply skills and strategies from foreign language courses in other areas. While some students initially complained about the extra work of the learning journals, for example, the majority valued them. In one class the students even complained when journals were not part of the third semester course.

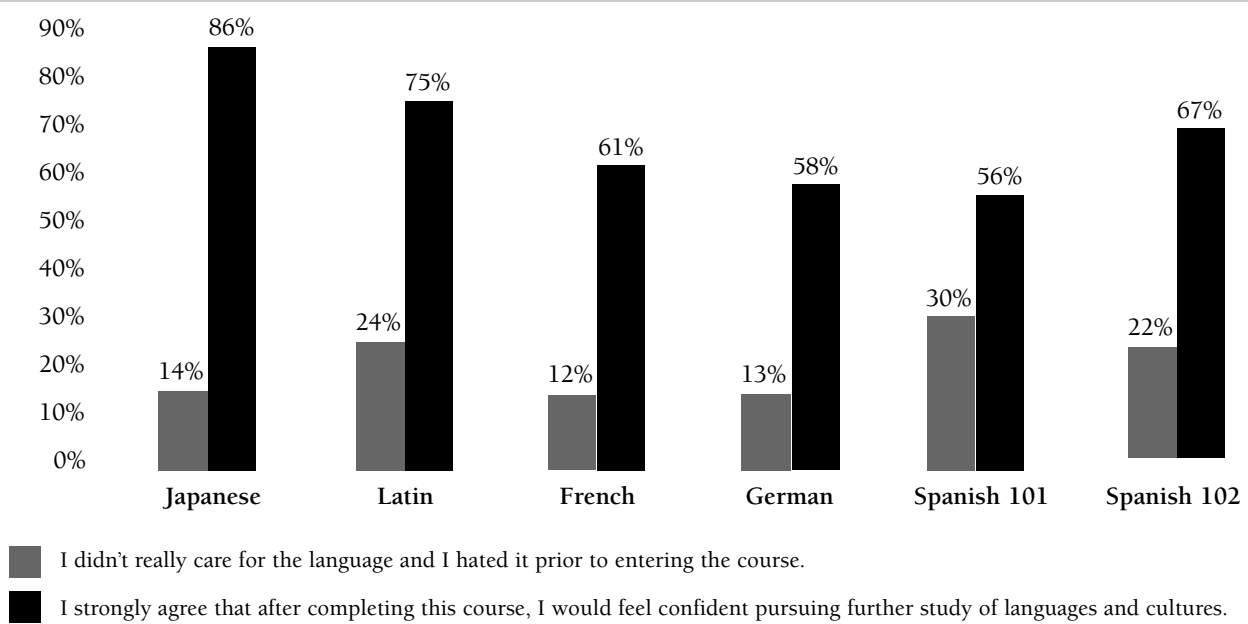


Program implementation was not without its pitfalls and frustrations, but the steering committee and instructors viewed the program as a “work in progress” and were not afraid to make alterations where necessary as long as the departmental standards were maintained. For example, during the pilot stage of the program (1999–2000),

students were given an explanation sheet with general questions for consideration in journals, but were not given the specific weekly questions for the journals that are now in use (see Appendix A). After questions were developed, instructors uniformly saw an increase in the depth, specificity, and quality of student responses to the final exam

**Table 3**

STUDENT RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE AND AFTER COMPLETING BASIC STUDIES FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES



**Table 4**

ASPECTS OF THE COURSE STUDENTS FOUND MOST VALUABLE

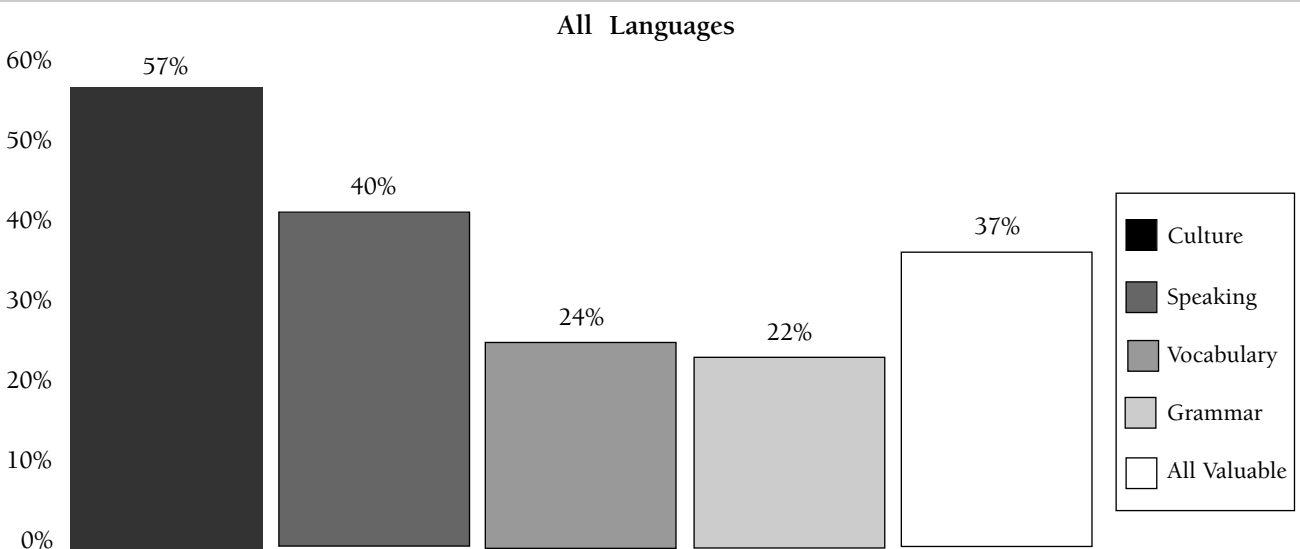
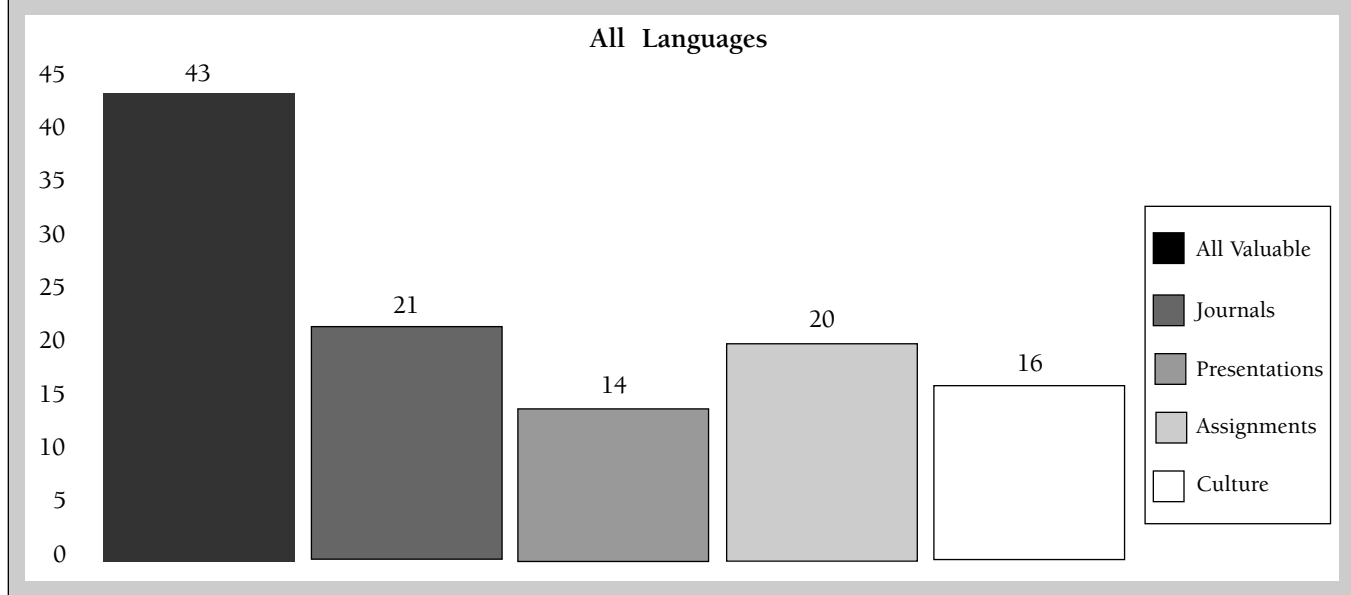


Table 5

## ASPECTS OF THE COURSE STUDENTS FOUND LEAST VALUABLE



questions addressing holistic application and diversity sensitivity. Journal entries also became more focused, and the negative student feedback about the journal as an assignment (20%) evident in Table 5 has since decreased. To accommodate classroom management issues for instructors teaching four courses per semester, learning journals were sometimes collected less frequently in large enrollment sections. Guidelines for oral proficiency interviews were also modified to address management issues in high enrollment sections.

The department accepted some compromises in reaching agreement with the university faculty on the foreign language requirement. As a consequence, these courses met only three times per week. As compared with the previous four-day-per-week format with an additional lab day, students received one fourth less in-class instruction over the course of one year. However, students did have access to most lab work 24 hours a day through the virtual lab. The result is that student outcomes were quite different from the traditional introductory course, and these differences did indeed affect courses at the intermediate level. The department is in the process of designing articulation between the “general education phase” and the “professional” portion of the curriculum.

## Conclusions

Different than your parents’ language course? You bet. The experience of ISU suggests that foreign language requirements work. The key to these requirements was a close assessment of intended goals and outcomes and the design of a program that clearly put those goals and outcomes first. The ISU model combined the philosophy and best

practices in communicative language methodology, general education, and multicultural studies to achieve a program which strove to “do what it says it can do,” namely serve the needs of its target population of language–culture learners.

The ISU model also addressed many of the historical and recent criticisms of foreign language requirements. First, it offered the oral proficiency-oriented instruction that students want and recognize as foundational for success in the 21st century. The program assessed that proficiency through oral interviews, presentations, and the program assessment checklist to assure the university and students themselves that outcomes were achieved. Second, user-friendly syllabi, learning journals, and student-centered pedagogy addressed the needs of reluctant or disadvantaged learners. Third, the program goals placed special emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills through the identification of “cultural critical thinking.” In journals and classroom discussions, students engaged in meaningful development of cultural awareness (of the target culture and their own) and diversity sensitivity. Fourth, the expanded use of the learning journals as a tool for both individual and programmatic assessment was a key feature of the program. The introduction of journals that combined cultural critical thinking and metacognitive reflection about the learning process was relatively new to foreign language methodology. Fifth, the holistic approach to language and culture study encouraged students to relate their study to other disciplines and gave them many different opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and personal growth. While it was not specifically a “languages-across-the-curriculum” approach, it offered some of the benefits as

students discovered applications for their language and culture knowledge across disciplines. Most importantly, the program designers strove to create a program fully integrated into the university's strategic plan and General Education Program. The flexibility of the ISU standards allowed many language disciplines to work together in maintaining a uniform curriculum. By working democratically, all languages and instructors at all professional ranks were included in design and ongoing assessment and, therefore, were invested in the program. Students, too, expressed appreciation for their involvement in program assessment and modification. While the amount of language exposure and skill level of students who completed the program differed from those of students completing traditional programs, the students' gains in research and critical thinking skills and their development of cultural awareness and diversity sensitivity were valuable.

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## Notes

1. Interestingly, faculty members at a neighboring university were engaged in similar discussions around the same time (Oukada, 2001). We were not aware of their work when we developed our program, but find that many of the principles Oukada enumerates substantiate our own conclusions.
2. The most recent MLA survey of foreign language entrance and degree requirements (1994–1995) indicates that entrance requirements remained steady in the 1980s and into the 1990s (though still lower than in the 1960s and 1970s), while the percentage of four-year institutions with degree requirements increased slightly from 1980s levels (Brod and Huber, 1996).
3. Klayman (1978) cites anonymous survey respondents.
4. The exact requirement language follows: "Foreign languages 101 and 102 in a single language, 6 hours, is required of all students, unless they have completed the equivalent of two years (4 semesters) of a single language at the high school level with an average grade of C or better. Performance on a placement test will be used to place students who do meet the requirement. International students whose first language is not English will be exempt from the requirement. Students entering ISU with an associate's degree from an institution other than ISU may be exempt from this requirement by the recommendation of the program in which they enroll at ISU." While the faculty doubts that successful completion of two years of high school foreign language is equivalent to the proposed university curriculum, it accepts the compromise that these students have had a successful experience in foreign language study at the high school level, while the students targeted by the foreign language requirement have not.
5. The majority of students (82.6%) identified themselves as Caucasian; only 12.9% identified themselves as U.S. minorities and 4.5% were international students.
6. ISU conducted studies to determine the climate for students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (including international students) in 1995. The studies concluded that ISU at that time needed to do more to enhance the climate for these populations of students.
7. ISU's General Education Program (2000) contains four common goals: communication, critical thinking, lifelong learning,

and issues of value and belief.

8. In keeping with the democratic spirit of the working group, all who taught in the program are referred to herein as instructors, regardless of their rank or status.
9. The final edition of the Indiana Academic Standards for Foreign Languages was published in 2000 and continues to be used in professional development and program modification.
10. We used wording similar to the Indiana K–12 standards in developing the departmental standards in order to facilitate articulation between secondary schools and the university.
11. Alalou's study reiterated the research findings that students rate speaking and listening skills highly when asked about their goals for language study (Alalou, 2001). Our subsequent student surveys bear this out for ISU students.
12. It is significant that although emphasis was on communicative skills, the program still strove to develop all four skills and did not forsake grammatical structure (as evidenced in the grading weights of the final exam). As Conrad (1999) pointed out, students do value grammatical competency; in fact, early language learners believe this is an important part of their learning experience.
13. Schulz suggested use of the ACTFL-ETS scale for assessment of proficiency. We prefer her use of the term "competency-based" assessment, which is demonstrated in ISU's program through the standards assessment checklist. The application of the standard to Latin includes speaking and listening, but recognizes a stronger emphasis on the skills of reading and writing.
14. Because the department was relatively small with no language totaling more than four graduate students and adjunct instructors and the language coordinator worked closely with them, a complete set of course packet of lesson plans like those given to teaching assistants at major universities was unnecessary.
15. Course pedagogy guidelines state, "The courses should be proficiency-oriented and student-centered; the courses should integrate diverse technologies (Internet, video, visual and audio media) both in the classroom and in out-of-class assignments; the courses should include regular use of the language lab or web-accessed comprehension assignments; the Standards are understood as inclusive and interrelated. Mastery in one area will frequently demonstrate mastery in other areas as well. Thus, the pedagogy employed in these classes as well as assessment tools will also reflect the interrelatedness of the Standards."
16. Introspective diary studies of foreign language instructors learning a target language (Bailey, 1980, 1983; F. Schumann & J. H. Schumann, 1977) and the use of dialogue journals with ESL learners (Staton, Shuy, Kreeft & Reed, 1988) are related metacognitive tools. The revised curriculum of ISU expands the scope of the language learning journal to include development of cultural learning.

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## Appendix A

### *Sample Learning Journal Questions 101* (First Semester)

#### Week 1:

(1) What are your goals for this class? (2) Describe your emotions as you begin this course. Are you confident or unsure of yourself? Excited or resigned? Do you have fears about learning a language? (3) Have you had other successes that will help you with language learning? (4) How might someone from your community describe a typical speaker of [the language], whatever typical means to you? Do you know any native speakers of the target language or have you had any personal contacts that would lead you to agree or disagree with the general description above?

#### Week 3:

(1) How is language learning going this week? Are you experiencing successes with the class? Describe one. Do you think you are studying effectively? How do you typically study the materials? Are you employing new learning strategies? Do you have any concerns? (2) What are you learning about your own language and culture through the study of [the language and culture]?

#### Week 5 or 6:

(1) Have you talked about things related to [the language and/or culture] in other classes (history, environment, geography, literature, etc.)? (2) How can you use the target language or your knowledge of the target language and culture outside of the classroom? How will you use this knowledge even when you have stopped taking classes? (optional) Would the study of language and culture be useful in the career path you have chosen? How could you combine them? Have you considered how study abroad might enrich your studies?

#### Week 8, 9, or 10:

(1) Reflect on the goals that you had for yourself in this course. Do you feel that you are making progress toward those goals? How do you measure your progress? What will you need to do to finally reach your goals? (2) Have you found yourself thinking about a new perspective or different value system since you began the study of language and culture in this class? Describe your thinking.

#### Week 12, 13, or 14:

(1) What are three things you have learned about [the culture] which you think that you will remember a year from now? Why do you think you will remember them? Do they tell you something important about [the people]? Something important about your own culture and people? What? (2) Now that you have been studying a new language for a semester, how might you react if you encountered a nonnative speaker of English who needed help? Would you have responded this way before taking this class? If you would have, how might the encounter be different than before?

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## Appendix B

### *Holistic Rubric to Grade Journals*

#### Excellent      10 points

- Looking for, discussing, analyzing cultural encounters, or connections with other courses
- Addresses all aspects of the writing prompt
- Includes specific details of personal thoughts, feelings, and applications to own life
- Shows evidence of reflection and introspection on the learning process
- Attention to English grammar and spelling, submitted on time
- Neatly written and professional\*

#### Good              9–8 points

- Looking for and discussing cultural encounters or connections with other courses, no analysis
- Attempts most aspects of the writing prompt
- Includes general details of personal thoughts, feelings, and applications

- Shows some evidence of reflection and introspection on the learning process
- Some minor errors of English grammar or spelling, submitted on time
- Legible\*

**Adequate 7–6 points**

- No inclusion of cultural encounters
- Includes only limited expansion of ideas
- Omits one or more aspects of the writing prompt
- Numerous errors of English grammar/spelling, submitted on time
- Handwriting difficult to read\*

**Inadequate 5–1 points**

- Responds in short, superficial manner
- Includes no evidence of reflection
- Does not correspond to prompt
- Tardy
- Almost illegible\*

**Failing 0**

- No entry

Journals are collected biweekly, although students may be writing regularly in the journal. At each grading, the instructor assigns the appropriate points. Use of half-points are left to the discretion of the instructor.

\*The last criterion is applicable for those who choose to offer the option of submitting handwritten journals rather than online versions.

## Appendix C

### *Rubric for Grading Final Exam Diversity Sensitivity and Holistic Approach Questions*

<i>Excellent</i> (5 of 5)	Shows evidence of reflection on the learning process OR Shows evidence of diversity sensitivity AND Shows evidence of development of critical thinking skills as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student includes specific details (knowledge)</li> <li>• Student is able to apply (interpret, demonstrate) that knowledge to the questions</li> <li>• Student is able to analyze (compare, contrast, examine) the material he/she presents</li> <li>• Student is able to evaluate (appraise, assess) the material she/he presents</li> </ul> Addresses all aspects of the prompt Communicates ideas very well Shows an excellent understanding of the issue
<i>Good</i> (4–4.5)	Shows some evidence of reflection on the learning process OR Shows some evidence of diversity sensitivity AND Shows some evidence of development of critical thinking skills as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student includes specific details (knowledge)</li> <li>• Student is able to apply that knowledge to the questions</li> <li>• Student is able to do some analysis</li> </ul> Addresses all aspects of the prompt Communicates ideas fairly well Shows good understanding of the issue

*Adequate*  
3.5 Shows limited evidence of reflection on the learning process  
OR  
Shows limited evidence of diversity sensitivity  
AND  
Shows some evidence of development of critical thinking skills as follows:  
• Student includes specific details  
• Student begins to apply that knowledge to the questions, but with limited evidence of analysis  
Attempts most aspects of the prompt  
Communicates ideas adequately  
Shows minimal understanding of the issues

*Inadequate*  
0–3 Shows no evidence of reflection on the learning process  
OR  
Shows no evidence of diversity sensitivity  
AND  
Shows little evidence of development of critical thinking skills as follows:  
• Student is unable to give details or  
• Student is unable to apply knowledge to the questions  
Does not address the writing prompt

**Appendix D**

*Standards Assessment Checklist (Sample for 102)*

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

CS = Communicative Skills CA = Cultural Awareness D = Diversity HA = Holistic Application

Fill in each area using the following criteria:  
1 = does not meet standard 2 = meets standard 3 = exceeds standard

The Standards for Basic Studies Foreign Language should be used in completing the Standards Assessment Checklist.

Name	Final Exam				Presentation				Learning Journal				Oral Interview							
	CS	CA	D	HA	CS	CA	D	HA	CS	CA	D	HA	CS	CA	D	HA				
Sally Student	2	2	2	2	2	2		2				3	3	3	2					2

Note: Lined areas suggest that this standard is not expected to be met with this tool. Shaded areas suggest that measurement of this standard is optional with this tool.