

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.¹ 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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