

LANGUAGES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: A POSTSECONDARY INITIATIVE

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Introduction

As the United States has become more global in its economic, and political outlook, many employers have come to recognize the need for personnel with language and cultural skills in order to compete effectively in the international marketplace. At the same time, many language educators have come to realize that the traditional language program based on one to two years of the study of grammar structures followed by literature-based courses will not produce the type of skills necessary for working in the global economy.

In a 1991 position paper entitled "A National Plan for a Use-Oriented Foreign Language System," Richard D. Lambert, Director of the National Foreign Language Center, explained, "We expend almost all of our national resources for foreign language learning on first-time, low-level language learning among high school and college students, then watch those minimal skills decay and disappear through lack of use or reinforcement... We need a set of institutions that will reinforce and build upon past language learning." (Lambert, 1991)

Definition

Throughout the United States many postsecondary institutions have begun to experiment with language programs that will reinforce and build upon prior

language learning. These programs fall under the general rubric of "Languages Across the Curriculum." Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC) or Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum (FLAC) are two widely accepted designations for curricular innovations that allow students to apply their knowledge of a language other than English in courses outside language departments and/or integrate other disciplines into language courses. While the languages of most LAC programs tend to be French, German, and Spanish, programs can involve the less commonly taught modern languages as well as Latin. The "export model" of LAC refers to programs that use language materials in courses outside the language department; the "import model" of LAC refers to programs that integrate materials from other disciplines into language courses. There are currently many institutions that have adopted or are in the process of adopting some form of a Languages Across the Curriculum program. Many of these new initiatives are based on four well-known model programs; these programs are described below.

Model Programs

Earlham College

Earlham College (Uurasek, 1988) was one of the first schools to devise a foreign language program that cuts across the entire college curriculum. Faculty

"facilitators" in disciplines other than foreign languages reviewed and refined their second language skills in order to integrate foreign language reading materials into their regular courses. Courses which already used translations of foreign language texts were identified. The facilitators then chose brief but key passages from those texts to use with foreign language students. In order to participate in the program the faculty facilitators need only reading knowledge of the foreign language; they then help the students read and understand the materials in that foreign language. Materials might include selections such as Kant's letters in a philosophy class, a French translation of a portion of a play by Shakespeare, and "de Tocqueville's L'ancien regime et la revolution" in a European history class. After several experimental years the Earlham program is now solidly entrenched within the entire curriculum; the schedule of classes indicates which courses have French, German, or Spanish options. Jurasek points out that Earlham College has demonstrated to its students that language study can be meaningful, and the foreign language faculty is satisfied that the college curriculum has a skill-using foreign language component.

State University of New York at Binghamton

In the fall of 1991 the State University of New York at Binghamton (Badger, Rose, Straight, 1993) initiated its pilot program in Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC). They enlisted international graduate students as Language Resource Specialists to prepare foreign-language reading materials, primarily in French, German, and Spanish, for use in seven

undergraduate academic courses that would not usually include such materials. The Language Resources Specialists who were selected were proficient in one of the languages of the program and possessed the necessary disciplinary background. In consultation with the LAC staff the Language Resource Specialists prepared class assignments using non-English reading selections from newspapers, magazines, journals, and books. Undergraduate students at SUNY-Binghamton could enroll in one of the LAC courses based on their own interest and their performance on a simple, selfgraded reading comprehension test in the foreign language. The workload of the LAC students was balanced with that of the regular students by substituting one LAC assignment for two regular assignments or by making the LAC assignments significantly shorter. The workload adjustments were balanced by the linguistic and cultural benefits gained through the use of non-English materials.

Most of the LAC course faculty had little or no knowledge of the foreign languages used in the LAC classes. Within the LAC classes the Language Resource Specialists provided all instructional materials in the foreign languages and prepared ancillary aids in the form of glossaries and commentaries to accompany the foreign language readings. The Language Resource Specialists also served as discussion leaders, tutors, and graders. The SUNY-Binghamton LAC program differs significantly from the Earlham program in its use of international graduate students instead of regular faculty members to prepare course materials. The Binghamton model does

not rely on extensive faculty development efforts or the development of new courses. The Binghamton program also relies almost exclusively on the reading skill.

The benefits of the SUNY-Binghamton program have been extensive. The undergraduate participants in the program improved their foreign language reading comprehension skills while the international students benefitted from their service as Language Resource Specialists. The SUNY-Binghamton curriculum has benefitted from the great variety of cultural perspectives brought to classroom topics by the international students.

St. Olaf College

St. Olaf College (Allen, Anderson, Narvaez, 1992) has developed a more ambitious program that enables students to make significant use of second languages in a wide variety of courses in the humanities, behavioral and natural sciences, and mathematics. The use of the foreign language ranges from courses that are "enriched" with foreign language readings to full immersion courses. St. Olaf students with at least intermediate high proficiency in a foreign language may take courses in other disciplines with an Applied Foreign Language Component (AFLC). Participants in AFLC courses substitute texts in a foreign language for a number of the assigned English-language course readings. They also participate in a special weekly discussion conducted in the second language. Students may submit their written work in English or the foreign language. Each completed AFLC course carries an additional one-quarter course credit; successful completion of

two AFLC courses is recognized on student transcripts by the Applied Foreign Language Certification.

The St. Olaf program began with language components in French, German, and Spanish in humanities courses. With grant support they have expanded the languages to include Chinese, Norwegian, and Russian; disciplines beyond the humanities have been added to the program as well.

Participating faculty members at St. Olaf College work in pairs to prepare an AFLC course; one member of the pair represents a language and the other the cooperating discipline. As a pair they first explore the relationship between foreign language study and the study of the other discipline as well as the curricular and pedagogical implications of integrating non-English language texts into the course of that other discipline. The faculty pair then shapes teaching methods, identifies materials for library purchase, selects appropriate foreign language texts for course use, and prepares study guides, glossaries, and other course materials.

Students who have participated in the St. Olaf program benefit from an expanded vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. The students also value the access they have to texts not normally studied in language classrooms and sometimes unavailable in English and special insights into course content. Participating faculty members report that the AFLC program has helped increase interdisciplinary collaboration and curricular coherence on campus. In addition, the program has served as a catalyst for all faculty members to enhance their own foreign

language proficiency. Command of a second language has even become a factor in the recruitment of new faculty members across the college. For the foreign language faculty, the AFLC program has reaffirmed the importance of language study not as just the acquisition of a set of skills but as an important means of accessing information and learning in all disciplines.

The University of Rhode Island

The University of Rhode Island has taken the Languages Across the Curriculum concept even further by developing a joint degree program in German and engineering offered through the International Engineering Program. Students in the program graduate in five years with a B.A. in German and a B.S. in an Engineering discipline. The key features of the program are German-language courses tailored to Engineering students during the first three years of study, a six-month paid internship in an engineering firm or research institute in a German-speaking country during the fourth year, and in the fifth year both traditional upper-level German language and literature courses and a special interdisciplinary engineering course taught in German by bilingual engineering faculty members.

The program, developed largely through the efforts of John Grandin, Chair of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, has been highly successful; the graduates of the program have found jobs using both their German-language and engineering skills. The success of this program has allowed the faculty to consider expansion into other language

areas including Chinese, French, and Japanese. In addition, a similar program is being initiated with the College of Business at the University of Rhode Island. Through grant support the business faculty is learning German, and the German faculty is learning business skills in preparation for a six semester, team-taught sequence of German courses focusing on issues of international business.

Grandin reports that the faculty at URI no longer think of their field as a monodimensional one that takes literary study as its single goal. They believe that language learning must be integrated into the disciplines of all students and taught across the curriculum. Grandin further states that their Languages Across the Curriculum programs have provided a richer education experience for the student and an enrichment for the faculty as well. The faculty involved gain a much clearer appreciation for each other's disciplines. According to Grandin, Languages Across the Curriculum initiatives have become the centerpiece around which faculty members from traditionally disparate areas can gather with very productive results.

Summary

While the model programs of the Languages Across the Curriculum initiatives vary greatly, all programs have one common thread: the programs allow students to apply their knowledge of a language other than English in courses outside language departments and/or integrate other disciplines into language courses. LAC programs simultaneously improve language skills while using those

skills to acquire information and perspectives in other disciplines. Both students and faculty members participating in the programs benefit. In many cases the entire ethos of the institution changes as faculty members and students alike see the advantages of using foreign languages to acquire multicultural perspectives within a variety of disciplines.

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