

Proposal for a Foreign Language Requirement at Salisbury University

Recommendation

The Salisbury University Strategic Plan for 2009-2013 calls for internationalization of the university's curriculum, campus and overall student experience to prepare graduates for work in an increasingly globalized economy and life in an interconnected world. With those goals in mind, chairs within the Fulton School of Liberal Arts took up the question of a foreign language requirement in late spring 2011. During summer 2011 an advisory committee, made up of Drs. Keith Brower, Linda Cockey, Louise Detwiler, Victoria Hutchinson and Leonard Robinson, developed the following recommendation:

The advisory committee recommends that Salisbury University adopt a graduation requirement for all Bachelor of Arts degrees of 102-level proficiency in a foreign language, beginning fall 2013.

Rationale for the recommendation

Foreign language study is an essential component of a liberal education. Particularly as Salisbury University looks to internationalize its campus, it must support the opportunity to achieve proficiency in a number of world languages. Our general education student learning goals already state that a "well educated person will possess knowledge of a second language or culture." The study of a second language and attendant cultures benefits the individual far beyond the ability to communicate with others who speak that language. It enables the individual to understand her own culture and identity better, as well as the diversity of cultures within this country and around the world. More practical considerations argue in favor as well: foreign language ability helps to distinguish one job candidate from another in an increasingly competitive workforce.

The implementation of a foreign language requirement would, for the first time, create a distinction between the University-level requirements for the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees at Salisbury. This change would bring us into company with many institutions within the University System of Maryland and across the country.

While few education professionals would dispute the importance of foreign language study, its place and weight in the curriculum has to be assessed carefully alongside other general education goals and those of major and minor programs. Rules, guidelines and common sense argue for a requirement that will not require massive reallocation of resources, imposition of requirements that swell the general education program, pile on to programs that may already be intensively prescriptive, and slow a student's progress toward graduation.

The proposed requirement would be more significant for what it promotes than what it demands of students. As the following discussion illustrates, the recommendation aligns well with existing high school graduation requirements, and our research suggests that the vast majority of incoming students would not be forced to take a course they otherwise would not be required to take. The requirement would enable us to ensure that our B.A. graduates have achieved our

general education outcome. It would create a modest increase in demand for seats in foreign language courses, which we believe we can readily meet with existing resources. That modest boost, however, would help increase the visibility of our modern languages offerings and help open the door to the increasing array of international education opportunities that we offer.

We currently offer 101 and 102 courses in Spanish, French, German, Mandarin and Russian. We also have offered American Sign Language on a fairly regular basis and would support counting it toward meeting the requirement. The globalization of our curriculum suggests that we consider adding Japanese, Hindi, Arabic and Portuguese. A potential risk is that we would end up with impressive breadth, but no depth. In some cases we may be able to support language study beyond 102 here on campus – in Mandarin Chinese, for example – but the preferred path is toward international education. A student with 102-level proficiency in Mandarin would be able to spend a semester in our East Asian Studies program at Anqing University in China, which involves intensive language study as well as coursework in English and a rich variety of cultural opportunities.

Logistics: Placement, Impact and Staffing/Costs

Over eighty per cent of our students are from Maryland, where the state requires two years of language study to graduate from high school. We would count students with two years of language study in high school as having 101-level proficiency. From Admissions we know that seventy percent of our incoming freshmen have had three years of foreign language study, which at Salisbury University would count as 102-level proficiency: requirement met. For transfer students, the requirement could be met prior to arrival here through a combination of high school and college coursework.

The number of students having to take a foreign language course as a result of this requirement would be modest. The advisory committee estimates that between ten and twenty sections of 102-level foreign language courses per year, above the number currently offered, would be required to meet student need. These would be covered, at least initially, by adjunct faculty members, at an estimated cost of between \$30,000 and \$60,000. The funds to pay the additional adjuncts would come largely from money generated by the student credit hours associated with the sections in question. Over time we would monitor student interest in particular languages to determine whether tenure-line positions might be needed to support courses and programs beyond the 101 and 102 level.

Other Recommendations

- For native speakers of a language other than English, satisfactory performance on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) would satisfy the requirement.
- Heritage speakers of a language other than English who do not meet the requirement through documented course work would have the opportunity to demonstrate 102-level proficiency completion of an appropriate placement examination. (Example: “First-generation” U.S. citizens or residents who learned to speak their parents’ native language at home, but without formal study.)
- Students whose high school or pre-SU college record places them into a 102-level course for a language that SU does not offer at the time would be permitted to fulfill the requirement by taking one semester (101) of a different language.

Consideration Process

The advisory committee strongly urges open and transparent consideration of the B.A. foreign language requirement outlined here, leading to a decision by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year. Though the discussion began in the Fulton School, it has already expanded to include department chairs of other Bachelor of Arts programs (Social Work and Economics), representatives of the Faculty Senate and the academic deans. In the upcoming weeks, in consultation with colleagues across campus, we will map out the process whereby the discussion can continue and a decision can be made.