

Statement on the Current Language Other Than English Requirements for all B.A. Programs

The University of Illinois should maintain the current Language Other Than English requirements for all B.A. programs, including online degrees. Language study is not optional; it is fundamental to a well-rounded education that enables students to succeed professionally and engage meaningfully in a multilingual world.

Learning another language is not a barrier; it is a key that opens doors. Students who complete a minimum of three semesters of language study develop skills that translate directly to success in workplaces and communities. Almost one in five Americans speaks a language other than English at home, and most U.S. employers say they depend on workers who know another language.[1][2] The knowledge of languages helps people serve clients, patients, and coworkers. It also provides graduates of the University of Illinois with a competitive advantage, since employers increasingly value bilingualism—and many bilingual professionals command higher salaries.[3]

Reducing the Language Other Than English requirements would narrow our students' opportunities, particularly for those who lacked access to language learning in high school. Many claim that reducing the requirement would benefit this disadvantaged student population, but the exact opposite is true: rather than widening that gap, we should help close it. A minimum of three semesters of language study builds not only linguistic ability but also critical thinking and communication skills. Studies show that bilingual individuals tend to have stronger focus, improved problem-solving, and better memory retention.[4] These are the same skills that drive success in every major and career.

To learn another language is to learn another way of seeing the world. That realization—that there are other ways to think, speak, and live—is at the core of a genuine college education.

Online learners may require flexibility, but the university can adapt without compromising rigor. For instance, one of the minimum of three required Language Other Than English courses could take the form of a FLAC (Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum) class, blending professional language training in areas such as nursing, business, or data management with continued exposure to another language.

The conversation about the role of Languages Other Than English in our curriculum goes to the heart of who we are—and who we aspire to be—as a land-grant, world-class university. Preserving the current Language Other Than English requirements demonstrates our commitment to knowledge, communication, and global citizenship. It prepares graduates to excel in a competitive world while upholding our mission to educate the whole person. Students pursuing online degrees at Illinois deserve the same standard of academic excellence as those studying on campus. We owe it to them, to ourselves, and to the State of Illinois that employs us.

Signed by members of the Department of French and Italian:

Julie Gaillard (Assistant Professor of French)
Aurore Mroz (Associate Professor of French SLATE, Director of the “French Around the Corner” public engagement initiative)
Amy Clay (Teaching Associate Professor of French, Director of French Basic Language)
Felisa Vergara Reynolds (Associate Professor of French)
Laurence Mall (Associate Professor of French)
Manuel Rota (Associate Professor of Italian, Director of the European Union Center)
Laura Hill (Senior Lecturer, Director of Italian Basic Language)
Eda Derhemi (Teaching Associate Professor of Italian)
Ciro Incoronato (Assistant Professor of Italian)
Nora Stoppino (Associate Professor of Italian, Interim Department Head)
Zsuzsanna Fagyal (Professor of French Linguistics)
Marcus Keller (Associate Professor of French)
François Proulx (Associate Professor of French)
Macha Petre (Ph.D. student in French SLATE)
Sasha Aisha Craig (Ph.D. student in French)
Nico Norris (Ph.D. student in French)
Soraya Cipolla (Ph.D. student in Italian)
Scarlet Peterson (Ph.D. student in French SLATE)
Amelia Reggi (Ph.D. student in Italian)
Jesse Keruskin (Ph.D. student in French)

Endnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, “Languages We Speak in the United States” (2022).
2. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), *Making Languages Our Business* (2019).
3. Olga Scrivner et al., “Does Being Bilingual Pay Off? Evidence from the U.S. Census,” *PLOS ONE* (2023).
4. Viorica Marian & Anthony Shook, “The Cognitive Benefits of Being Bilingual,” *Cerebrum* (2012).