

November 5, 2025

Re: EP.25.082, Revision to the Language Other Than English (LOTE) Requirement for Online Degree Completion Programs

We, the undersigned faculty in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, do not support a blanket reduction of the LOTE requirement to two semesters for Illinois online degree completion programs.

In our state, the nation, and globally, an Illinois degree represents a world-class education, which rests on high academic standards. Lowering these standards for an entire category of degree programs is antithetical to our commitment to provide the very best undergraduate education possible to all our students.

Although the proposal presents the reduction as a way to bridge an equity gap, we see it as quite the opposite. By lowering the requirement, we would be effectively and knowingly sending online completion students the message that they do not need to meet the same standards as the tens of thousands of other Illinois alumni who have come before them. Essentially, we would be telling students in online degree completion programs that we think they are less capable than others, which is contrary to our institution's commitment to equity and respect. Lowering the bar on the basis of questionable assumptions about the abilities of a population of students would neither reduce inequities nor enhance the profile of our university. Rather, the path to reducing inequities lies in meeting students where they are and helping them succeed, as we have done with great success in our Spanish basic language courses through the Inclusive Course Redesign Initiative (ICRI, <https://studentsuccess.illinois.edu/faculty-resources/icri/>).

In practical terms, the proposal rests on the assumption that three sequenced semesters of language study will not be easily available to students in an online program. Our Department, which enrolls more students in language courses than any other department, is ready and able to solve this perceived problem. Starting in Spring 2026 we will begin to offer third-semester Spanish (SPAN 130) online during the regular academic year (Fall and Spring terms) to meet student demand. Furthermore, students need not take three full semesters of language study to meet the existing requirement. The third-semester requirement can be met through proficiency exams or by taking two semester-long courses, SPAN 122, which combines the first two semesters of study into one and is designed for those with some prior, though not necessarily recent, Spanish study, and SPAN 130. We are committed to helping Illinois students succeed, regardless of whether they are on campus or online.

We have seen first-hand how life-changing language study at the University of Illinois can be as we witness the accomplishments of our own alumni, many of whom have been non-traditional students who tend to meet or exceed the expected proficiency levels in the basic language sequence. Moreover, our students gain 21st century skills necessary for the workforce from taking our language courses, which include developing critical thinking skills, information literacy, and creativity. Employers increasingly value not just language skills but also intercultural communication, adaptability, and empathy, all of which are honed in LOTE courses. If we lower our standards for the language requirement, we would do our online students a disservice and tarnish the well-earned reputation of our university.

For these reasons, we urge senators to vote “no” on EP.25.082.

Signed by

Ann Abbott, Teaching Assistant Professor

Melissa Bowles, Department Head, Professor

Brenden Carollo, Director of Fourth Semester Spanish, Instructor

Rodrigo Delgado, Assistant Professor

Sarah Dowman, Lecturer

Michelle Dutton, Assistant Director of the Introductory Spanish Program, Lecturer

Yamile Ferreira, Assistant Professor

Jorge García, Senior Lecturer

Mónica García-Blizzard, Associate Professor

Raquel Castro Goebel, Director of the Portuguese Language Program, Senior Instructor

Florencia Henshaw, Director of Advanced Spanish

José Ignacio Hualde, Professor

Brady Hughes, Senior Academic Advisor

John Karam, Professor

Jonathan MacDonald, Director of Graduate Studies, Associate Professor

Elena Peña Argüeso, Instructor

Alejandro Ramirez Mendez, Assistant Professor

Joyce Tolliver, Associate Professor

Anna Torres-Cacoullous, Assistant Professor

Rodrigo Viqueira, Assistant Professor

Angelica Waner, Assistant Professor

Kara Yarrington, Director of Introductory Spanish, Teaching Assistant Professor