



Louisiana State University

and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Department of Mathematics

February 7, 2001

To Professor Dan Fogel, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

From the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate

Recommendations Regarding Foreign Language Instruction at LSU and Articulation with K-12

The Committee has reported to you its finding that the first-semester foreign language courses should be deleted from the General Education list. This de-listing should prove consistent with the promotion of foreign language study at LSU, provided appropriate measures are taken. We urge you to take a personal interest, and to take a hand in doing what needs to be done.

Recommendation 1: LSU should undertake to improve the opportunities for foreign language study by undergraduates. We should make it a goal to increase the proportions of our graduates who achieve competency in a second language at the third-semester level or higher.

Meeting such a goal must be the shared work of K-12 schooling and University programs. Achieving improvements requires a wise combination of admissions policy, General Education requirements, options and requirements in our several degree programs, and communications about all of the above to the secondary schools and to prospective LSU students.

At the present time, a very high proportion of our entering freshmen have completed two or more semesters of a language in high school. And yet, during the 1999-2000 academic year, only about 2,000 foreign language placement/credit exams were taken by entering freshmen. The result was about 1,000 credits for one or more semesters. These numbers are too low.

Recommendation 2: LSU should convey to prospective students the following message: Along with the foreign-language unit requirements for admission go

both (1) an expectation of a competency achieved and (2) the promise of advantages and opportunities thereby opened up. In particular, at LSU's freshman orientation, students who have studied a foreign language in high school should take the placement/credit exam and should know the benefits of doing well on it.

During much of the Eighties, LSU routinely communicated to each high school within Louisiana, each year, the placement/credit profile in mathematics and English of its graduates who entered LSU, making clear the correlation with those students' high school records in those subjects.¹

We also informed the high school principals and counselors of the learning goals which we considered appropriate for the high school courses, and which were represented by our tests. Enclosed is a copy of the 1984 brochure, *High School Preparation for University Studies*, one of several which were widely distributed during that decade.

It is very important, when we launch into such communication, that we first make sure that our own house is in order. Accordingly, the Committee has inquired about the nature of the placement/credit exams that LSU now uses for foreign languages, to learn whether they are aligned with appropriate learning goals, including the understanding of speech as well as vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, and writing skills--and all in keeping with the new standards in foreign language instruction being promulgated by the Louisiana Department of Education (copy enclosed). We inquired because we have often heard that the tests in use were horribly out of date. We have found satisfactory answers; Mr. Robert Melson in the Measurement and Evaluation Center wrote us as follows:

French--The exam is one produced by the University of Wisconsin, copyright 1992. It has been in use at LSU since 1998.

Spanish--The exam is one produced by the University of Wisconsin, copyright 1992. It has been in use at LSU since 1995.

German--The exam is one produced by the AATG (American Association of Teachers of German), copyright 1990. It has been in use at LSU since 1993.

Latin--The exam is one produced by LSU's Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literature (specifically Drs. Emily Batinski and Ken Kitchell). It has been in use at LSU since 1995.

¹The "Buckley Amendment" specifically allows the exchange of such information for the improvement of academic programs. Incidentally, we also provided early placement tests in mathematics to be taken by rising seniors and advised them individually of their prospective placement and of what they might do in their senior year to improve it.

Professor Bob Lafayette advises that those are good exams. Dr. Bobby Matthews has assured us that the tests are administered under appropriate conditions, and with suitable technology.

Also, we met with Professor Emily Batinski, Chair of Foreign Languages and Literatures; and with Professors Lucie Brind'Amour and Beatrice Dupuy of French Studies, to discuss a number of pertinent issues, including articulation problems. We asked whether students who gain credit for one course through exams do well when they then move on and take the next course in the sequence. Our understanding is that they do indeed.

Recommendation 3: LSU should inform secondary school principals, counselors, and foreign language departments about (1) the nature of our placement/credit exams, (2) the learning goals which our language departments regard as appropriate for the high school courses, (3) the extent of foreign language competency requirements in our various degree programs, and (4) the opportunities of our entering freshmen to earn credit by AP and CLEP as well as our own placement/credit exams.

Recommendation 4: For a period of years, at least, LSU should provide feedback to secondary schools on the foreign language placement and credit earned by their graduates attending LSU, using the Admissions database to correlate those results with the students' high school records.

The Committee believes that foreign language study is of manifold benefit. It may benefit different students in different ways. No doubt it generally supports intellectual development in other disciplines, beginning with K-12. It can make a fundamental contribution to language skills generally, to good writing and to close and careful reading. Substantial competency in a language provides an opening to another culture as nothing else can. On a more mundane level, a language competency often extends a person's saleability in the job market and may open doors of opportunities throughout his or her career.

Recommendation 5: LSU should encourage the study of foreign languages generally. In particular, we should consistently provide adequate classes to meet the demand, and we should consider promoting immersion programs here and abroad.

It is rumored that English is taking over the world, and has become the language of culture, commerce and science, and such. A recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly* (*What Global Language?* by Barbara Wallraff, November 2000; copy enclosed) calls that assumption into question. See also *Surfing in Tongues*, a column in *Business Week*, December 11, 2000 (copy enclosed). In any event, it remains true that now, and for some time to come, the modern world economy and job market will call for a degree of engagement with people whose first language is not English, and will reward the ability to speak with them and understand their cultures fluently.

Recommendation 6: LSU should encourage its Colleges, Departments, and other units offering undergraduate degrees to consider establishing requirements or at least providing space in students' programs for foreign language study. Such consideration should proceed without the real or imagined fear that the language departments will not have the requisite support to provide the classes.

For example, it surely would be appropriate for students in the E. J. Ourso College of Business Administration, particularly those in International Trade and Finance, to learn a language. We note an increasing emphasis in engineering schools at other universities, M.I.T. and Rice among them, to introduce international components into their students' programs. Enclosed is a copy of an article on Rice's joining the Global Engineering Education Exchange.

We are really quite enthusiastic about LSU's opportunities to improve undergraduate education along these lines, and we look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,

Carruth McGehee, for the Committee

Copies by email to the other members of the Committee; to Professor Emily Batinski; and to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

Enclosures provided only for the Provost and for Prof. Batinski; and to others if requested.