

To: The Senate
From: Mary Docter & Modern Languages
Date: April 17, 2022
Re: Modern/Foreign Language GE Requirement

In our Six-Year Review, one of the key questions that emerged involved engaging the campus community in discussion of the GE foreign language requirement. As a first step, the Modern Language Department is seeking advice on a potential proposal to change the Modern/Foreign Language GE requirement from a one-course requirement to a competency requirement (of at least two semesters).

Current requirement (from college catalog; **emphasis mine)**

Modern/Foreign Languages. Westmont encourages students to continue developing their fluency in a language other than their native tongue by **requiring students to complete one semester of college language beyond the level of the two-year entrance requirement to the college. Alternatively, having met the entrance requirement in one language, they may take one semester of college-level study in another language.** A course in any modern spoken language (e.g., Spanish, French, or German) or ancient language (e.g., Greek or Hebrew) is accepted as fulfilling this requirement.

Students can also satisfy this requirement if they (1) submit a SAT Language Subject Test score of 580 or higher, (2) place into the fourth semester or higher (e.g., GER 4, SP 100, FR 100) of a language in a proctored examination setting at Westmont College, or (3) present evidence of a primary language other than English to the Student Records Office. [NOTE: AP scores need to be added here]

Realizing that learning a foreign language may be especially difficult for those with certain disabilities, Westmont offers accommodations for those who have a documented language-based learning disability. These students may take one semester of college level language at Westmont with the class graded on a Pass/No Credit basis, or they may take one semester of college level American Sign Language (ASL) for a letter grade at a community college. To qualify, students must present documentation of their disability to the Director of Disability Services. The Director will verify the documented disability and notify the Student Records Office if the student is eligible for a language-based learning disability accommodation.

Proposed language (changes marked **in red)**

Modern/Foreign Languages. Westmont encourages students to continue developing their fluency in a language other than their native tongue by requiring students to complete one semester of college language beyond the level of the two-year entrance requirement to the college **AND achieve a competency of at least the second-semester level.** Alternatively, having met the entrance requirement in one language, they may take **two** semesters of college-level study in another language. [...]

Rationale

- 1. Comparative data: Westmont has the lowest language requirement of any benchmark liberal arts institution,** and the college offers the fewest options for learning other languages (*see Table 1*). Other comparable liberal arts colleges require 3-4 semesters of language and if we seek to be competitive and to truly prepare our students to be global citizens, we need to do better.

2. **Mission:** Our current GE requirement is **insufficient for a liberal arts college that prides itself on a strong global plank.**¹ True global engagement and understanding is not possible without knowledge of the other's language and culture, and this knowledge cannot be achieved in a single, introductory language course.
3. **Competency:** As stated previously, currently the GE requires students to complete one semester of a language beyond the two-year entrance requirement to the college. Students may thus take a course at the level into which they are placed (with the majority placing into first or second semester) or they may take an introductory language course in a new language. After one semester of language instruction at the introductory level, students can merely use the present tense and very basic survival vocabulary on six general topics, such as telling time, going shopping, and talking about the family and the weather. **Our one-semester GE language requirement does not provide enough instruction for students to engage in the target language in meaningful ways or to understand anything beyond very basic aspects of culture.**
4. **Placement problems:** Because of this one-semester requirement, students with 3-4 years of high school language courses want to be placed in the first semester (something we do not allow). This is further complicated by the fact that students oftentimes wait until their junior or senior years to complete the requirement and thereby claim they have "forgotten everything and need to begin again." Others purposely do poorly on their exam to skew their results in order to be placed at a lower level in the hopes of having an "easy A." Of course, this disrupts the class by having drastically different levels of ability in a single class. By changing the requirement to the second-semester level course, students may in fact want to work hard to be in the correct, more advanced class rather than begging to be placed in Spanish or French 1.

Table 1 (Benchmark Schools: ML requirements, Languages & FTE)

Note: Data collected for our 2019 Six-Year Review

College/University	FL Requirement	Undergrad pop	Languages*	FTE**
Willamette University	4 semesters	1950	6/3	15
Pomona College	3 semesters	1650	6	24
Occidental College	2 semesters	2000	7/2	16
Calvin College	4 semesters	3600	7/2	16
Wheaton College	3 semesters	2400	4/3	12
Pepperdine University	3 semesters	3600	5/2	13
Westmont College	1 semester	1300	3/2	4

*Number of modern languages taught /number of classical languages (e.g. Greek, Hebrew, and Latin)

**Not counting professors of classical languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Latin) or part-time/adjunct professors

¹ From Westmont's webpage on the global plank: "Finally, the emphasis on the global nature of education is a recognition that our world has increasingly become interconnected and interdependent. To prepare people to function intelligently, effectively and for the good in a world of global politics, global economics, and global communications must be one of the aims of a Westmont education."