

UWGEC Second Language Policy Revision Rationale

UWGEC discussions around the proposal from the provost's office regarding the Foundations Second Language requirement were lengthy due to a few significant issues, which we detail here in hopes that other faculty governance bodies can understand the recommendation we have made, and hopefully move the proposal forward in a productive manner.

UWGEC acknowledges that the original proposal includes several important and positive changes, including:

- the standardization of Foundations portion of the second language requirement across all degree types
- the flexibility afforded to B.A. students on how they continue second language study (in the same or another language)
- new ways of satisfying the second language requirement (Seal of Biliteracy, certain language-intensive programs)

UWGEC also has significant concerns and reservations about high school coursework satisfying university requirements with no further proof of learning accomplished or outcomes achieved, and especially with the designation of 2 years of high school coursework (the same standard as university admissions requirement) as the equivalent of our second semester course-requirement.

Many members of UWGEC objected to this arrangement on principle out of a concern that this *de facto* undermined the Task Force's commitment to the importance of the Second Language requirement at the university. Others were concerned that this would set a precedent, eventually allowing high school coursework (without demonstration of proficiency or learning) to undermine foundations requirements in math and writing as well.

Subject matter experts pointed out that there is (in Arizona and nationwide) a shortage of qualified language teachers, meaning that in many cases students' high school experiences do not represent as substantive an engagement with another language or culture as the title of the course might suggest. The university cannot and should not be in the business of deciding which high schools or teachers are "good enough" to count, nor should it be deeming all high school experiences equal or satisfactory (especially in the absence of data to indicate that that is a reasonable assumption), and given the experiences of second language instructors at the UofA and those familiar with the placement and proficiency exams which indicate students with similar quantities of coursework arrive at the university with vastly different skill sets.

UWGEC nevertheless acknowledges that the Second Language Task Force did recommend (in its most contentious vote) that students be allowed to satisfy their Foundations requirement with High School coursework, recommending an arrangement similar to that currently used by the College of Engineering and sought after by some other non-B.A. programs. We understand that those programs (given the massive unit loads demanded by program needs or accrediting bodies) are often challenging for students to complete in 4 years, and that programs are attempting to ensure that barriers to student success are minimized. This is a worthwhile and important goal, though data showing that second languages represent a consistent or unique barrier to students' success are lacking.

Given all of the above, UWGEC has approved the policy with the following change: [To be selected at the meeting]

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- **OPTION 1:** Removing the following text from the “Course Completion’ section of the “Ways to satisfy the Requirement” (p.8-9): “One year of coursework taken in a second language at the high school level will be considered the equivalent of one semester at the post-secondary level.”
 - Students could still use the other 5 ways to satisfy the requirement in addition to university level coursework (Proficiency Exam, Credit by Exam (including CLEP, AP, IB, etc.), Seal of Biliteracy, Language-Intensive University Sponsored Study Abroad & Multilingual Learning Experiences, and/or International Admission).
 - Note: This would effectively remove the “Engineering Exception” as it currently stands, creating an equal playing field across the university, but is likely to be vociferously opposed by the College of Engineering and other units interested in helping their students bypass this requirement without demonstrating proficiency.
- **OPTION 2A:** Revising the following text from the “Course Completion’ section of the “Ways to satisfy the Requirement” (p.8-9): “~~One~~ **Two** years of coursework taken in a second language at the high school level will be considered the equivalent of one semester at the post-secondary level.”
 - This maintains a pathway through high school coursework, but at a higher standard. Based on the experiences of subject matter experts, students who have taken 4 years of High School language are much more likely to have had substantial experience and learning (both in terms of language proficiency and in terms of the other cultural and communicative aims of the second language requirement). The number of students who would do 4 years of language in high school and not pass a proficiency test at the second semester level is vanishingly small. And this option would therefore save students who have done this work from the extra hurdle of taking the proficiency test.
- **OPTION 2B:** Revising the following text from the “Course Completion’ section of the “Ways to satisfy the Requirement” (p.8-9): “~~One~~ **Three** years of coursework taken in a second language at the high school level will be considered the equivalent of **two** semesters at the post-secondary level.”
 - This has most of the same advantages as Option 2A but acknowledges (accurately) that a majority of students who have done 3 years of language would have had substantial experience and learning. While there will still likely be some students whose high school experiences were less thorough than we would hope, the third year of a high school language learning experience tends to be a major turning point, with substantially more sophisticated language use and deeper cultural work and thus represents a substantive leap forward compared to second year. Most students who take 3 years of High School could pass a language proficiency test at the second semester level.

UWGEC also recommends that the multiple use of courses be changed to better reflect the new B.A. standards, with the revision to the language on p. 24:

~~Third and fourth semester level~~ Second language courses taken to satisfy the Second Language requirement for a Bachelor of Arts degree may also apply to a major, pre-major, minor, and/or certificate (see Courses Excluded from the Minor).