

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN LUIS OBISPO
ACADEMIC SENATE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - AGENDA
November 22, 1983

- I. Minutes
- II. Announcements
- III. Business Items
 - A. Foreign Language Requirement (Ryan) (Attachment)
- IV. Discussion Items

Memorandum

o : Instruction Committee Members

Date : November 14, 1983

File No.:

Copies :

From : Kathy Ryan, Chair

Subject: Foreign Language Requirement

This is the report that will be sent to the Academic Senate. If you wish any changes to be made before it goes to the Academic Senate, please let me know as soon as possible. My office is FOB 23A and my extension is -2674. Leave a message with Vickie in Psychology (-2033) if you can't reach me.

The Academic Senate meets Tuesday, November 29, 1983 at 3:00 p.m.

Memorandum

to : James E. Simmons
Chair, Academic Senate

Date : November 14, 1983

File No.:

Copies :

From : Instruction Committee
Kathleen Ryan, Chair

Subject: Report on the Requirements of a Foreign Language

Attached is the report of the Instruction Committee on a foreign language requirement. In general, the committee recommends against imposing a foreign language exit requirement on all students at Cal Poly. Reasons for this recommendation focus on the following points:

- I. The Task Force conclusion that a foreign language requirement would not require additional resources does not apply to Cal Poly. A significant increase in staffing would have to occur even for a two-semester exit requirement.
- II. In view of the funding difficulties envisioned, the Committee feels that the Task Force on Foreign Language Requirement has not demonstrated, in the Committee's opinion, any substantial benefits to students of a two-semester exit requirement, particularly if there is no direct benefit in practical application.
- III. High-unit disciplines, such as engineering, would be particularly strained by such a requirement. Although not a sufficient reason in itself for rejecting the language requirement, direct benefits of such a requirement would appear to be minimal in comparison to other courses the student would elect, or be advised, to take.
- IV. The Committee anticipates difficulties in implementing the requirement in terms of competency attained rather than in terms of instruction completed.

The Committee's position is that there is a need, subjectively felt, to try to encourage and stimulate cross-cultural interaction in the hope of reducing the apparent spread of ethnocentrism and "white-bread" mentality. Some mechanisms already exist that address this need in the form of the GE&B requirements. Discussion

of other possible mechanisms may be warranted that might be more cost-effective than a foreign language requirement if the purpose of foreign language study is greater cross-cultural appreciation rather than practical application.

The Committee does agree that if individual departments wish to impose a requirement on their students, that they be free to do so. Further, students who wish to include languages in their programs be accommodated with as much assistance as is possible by their major department.

The Committee also feels that in view of the recommendation against a foreign language exit requirement, consideration and discussion be given to a foreign language entrance requirement, possibly modeled after the UC system.

Rationale For and Against the Foreign Language Requirement

I. Staffing

The foreign language department currently has seven full-time members. The department has estimated that a two-semester exit requirement would necessitate tripling its staff to about 20, while a three-semester exit requirement would necessitate a staff of about 45. In view of the significant increases that would be required, the foreign language department would rather see decisions concerning foreign language requirements made by individual departments.

II. The Committee disagrees with statements by the CSU Task Force on why foreign language study should be required of all students. Reasons cited in The Report (p. 3) are based on the following arguments:

1. Foreign language study leads to greater sensitivity to and understanding of the cultures of other peoples.
2. In the process of foreign language study, students become more aware of their own language and culture.
3. The process of study is a rigorous educational exercise in itself, worth pursuing as a process even if there were no discernible benefit in practical application.
4. The study of foreign language is important to the intellectual and cultural maturity of all students at the university level.

There is some doubt that a two-semester exit requirement, as recommended by the Task Force, would significantly increase sensitivity to and understanding of other cultures. A description of Level II proficiency (two-semester exit requirement) as made by the Foreign Language Liaison Committee of the California Articulation Council states the student's " . . . recognition of fundamental cultural values does not go much beyond overt elements apparent in the language itself (e.g., familiar versus formal forms of the second person)" (p. 7). Aware of this minimal impact of Level II proficiency on cross-cultural understanding, the Task Force would like to see Level III proficiency instituted as soon as funds become available. Their thinking seems to be that a little foreign language study is better than none at all, even though the little that is recommended does not result in the desired outcome for which it was recommended in the first place.

It is agreed that the study of foreign language is important to the student in that it fosters understanding of other cultures which ultimately may be important for the survival of one's own. What is needed, however, is a more efficient

mechanism that achieves these goals, particularly since the practical application of linguistic competence is not cited in the Task Force Report as a reason for imposing the requirement.

The Committee generally finds the rationale that study of foreign language results in increased awareness of one's own language may be true to some extent, but that the awareness is minimal compared to that generated by explicit study in English, which is already required of all students.

There is no doubt that foreign language study is a rigorous educational exercise. However, arguing for inclusion in a student's curriculum on that basis implies that there is a minimal rigor in the current curriculum. No evidence of this exists.

The argument cited by the Task Force that foreign language study is important to the intellectual and cultural maturity of all students is the most difficult argument to refute. Indeed, the committee does not disagree with this argument. If personal motivation is sufficiently high, great strides can be made in intellectual and cultural maturity in all students. However, it is recognized that foreign language study may have greater significance to those students pursuing a liberal arts program. In an era of financial insecurity and dwindling resources, choices and options are few. Thus, it may be wise to maximize the benefits of foreign language study by requiring such study only of those students who have the most to gain, either in increased career opportunities or in disciplines in which foreign language is an integral part of academic study. The Instruction Committee supports the view that individual majors should seriously initiate discussions as to whether a foreign language requirement should be instituted in their program.

III. High-Unit Disciplines

The Task Force Report states that any foreign language requirement should not be limited by discipline, even one which has a high-unit degree requirement as, for example, engineering. The report argues that if the reasons behind foreign language study are important, then they are important for everyone. The Committee agrees. However, the point is how significant are the reasons in view of what is achieved by a two-semester exit requirement and in view of the costs. Although high-unit disciplines are limited in the number of units they have to play with, it comes down to the worth of what is achieved by a two-semester foreign language requirement. Because many high-unit disciplines are in the technical fields, the worth is assessed primarily in terms of technical competence and career opportunities and only secondarily in terms of intellectual and/or cultural maturity. If career opportunities are significantly enhanced by proficiency in a foreign language, it should be up to the particular discipline to impose requirements.

The Task Force Report argued that the major reason used by high-unit disciplines is the threat of losing accreditation by not devoting sufficient time to requirements of the accrediting agency. According to Otto Davidson of the School of Engineering and Technology, this argument does not apply to the engineering curriculum at Cal Poly. His comments on this point are attached.

IV. Assessment of Competency

Generally, the Committee views more problems arising from assessing the requirement in terms of competency obtained than from instruction completed. If students must pass a particular criterion of performance on a competency exam in order to graduate from college, the students who take the exam immediately after completing two years of high school language will have an unfair advantage over a student who also had high school language but waited several years before entering college. However, from the point of view of the purpose of the requirement, linguistic competence is secondary to the multicultural understanding and intellectual maturity that is especially sought but which a proficiency exam probably will not measure.

For these reasons, if a language requirement is imposed, the Committee recommends that one semester of postsecondary study (junior college or university level) be equated with each year of secondary study (high school). In other words, completing two years of a foreign language at high school would be equivalent to completing two semesters at the University level.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that learning a foreign language results in intellectual stimulation as well as a renewed appreciation for diversity. Such an appreciation must be encouraged. However, the committee feels that funding problems impose difficulties in implementing a two-semester exit requirement which are unwarranted when the purpose of the requirement and the limited benefits are taken into account.

California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kathy Ryan
Chair, Instruction Committee

FROM: Otto C. Davidson - School of Engineering
and Technology *oed*

SUBJECT: Comments on the Requirement of a Foreign
Language and the Engineering Curricula

This is a summary of the curriculum problems which are faced by the engineering programs at Cal Poly. I have also included some rebuttal to the comments on high unit curricula which were made in the Report from the Task Force on Foreign Language Requirement (pp9,10). Since the Instruction Committee is recommending against a foreign language for Cal Poly, my comments are moot. I'm presenting them only for information.

G. E. & B. Requirements for Engineering at Cal Poly - S L O

There are fifty units in GE&B which can't be put in the science or engineering requirements of the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology. (My tabulation gives the following units in the GE&B areas: Area A = 14, Area C = 18, Area D = 15, Area E = 3.)

Professional requirements for engineering majors.
(Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology)

There are 120 units of engineering, math and science required by our accrediting body. (Math and Basic Science = 48, Engineering Science = 48, Engineering Design = 24.) There is also a requirement in humanities and social sciences, but the GE&B requirements are greater.

These units are somewhat different than the units in GE&B. The University requirements are quite definite numbers. The professional numbers are recommended minimums for a minimally creditable program.

The accrediting group has a number of other curriculum criteria which do not have specific units attached to them. In particular, the units not listed in the previous professional criteria "must

also show evidence of being a totally integrated experience that prepares the graduate to function as an engineer." Former Dean Robert Valpey, said that there is a letter on file from ABET which clearly states that the units not specified are not to be given over completely to general education.

Total of the above requirements = 170 units

We have left a maximum of 40 units. (In the past the engineering faculty has tried to keep thier curricula below the maximum allowabe 210 units, so the number of units should be less.) It's these remaining units which allow some uniqueness in the Cal Poly engineering degree, and it is these units which allow us to establish a quality above the very minimum required for an engineering degree.

The ABET accrediting requirements for engineering need some explanation. I feel that the the "Report of the Task Force on Foreign Language Requirement" is simplistic in its interpretation of engineering accrediting and in one place the report is factually incorrect. (Refer to pages 9 & 10 of the report.)

The factual error is the easiest to explain though it is not too important. The Report says near the bottom of page 9, "For example, the criteria of ... ABET require that a minimum the equivalent of one half year (equatable to ... 22.5 quarter units) be devoted to study of humanities and social sciences." While this particular quote deals with humanities and social sciences, it sets the stage for assuming that ABET equates a half year of study to 22.5 quarter units, or a full year to 45 units. This is not the case. ABET had for sometime equated a half year of study to one-eighth of the units in a four year curriculum. For a 210 unit curriculum that would make a half a year equal 26.25 units. Only recently has ABET relaxed a little. For curricula over 192 units, we may now take a half year of study to be 24 units.

More important is the simplistic reading of the ABET accrediting statements. The "Report" does not mention that the ABET accrediting is for a minimal engineering curriculum. I quote from the ABET "Criteria for Accrediting Programs in Engineering in the United States."

Under the section "Objectives of Accreditation" we have, "To identify to the public, prospective students, ...[and] potential employers, ... the institutions and specific programs that meet the MINIMUM criteria for accreditation." (Upper case letters are mine.)

Again in section "n" of the General Criteria, ABET is discussing

additional coursework beyond the specified 2.5 years in engineering, math and science and 0.5 years in humanities and social science. It says the following.

"The program must not only meet the specified MINIMUM content but must also show evidence of being a totally integrated experience that prepares the graduate to function as an engineer." (Capitals are mine.)

Hence one should regard the professional units given near the beginning of this note as the minimum number of units in science, math and engineering. I assume that Cal Poly is striving to excell in its particular type of engineering education. If so, then we will need all of the free units left in the program.

Lastly, the "Report" makes a comment about the preference of vocationally oriented programs to maintain their professional accreditation even if it means "the possible disapprobation of their colleagues in the liberal arts." This statement of the Task Force seems to differ from our Trustee's policy. I understand that the Trustees require that all programs which have recognized professional accrediting agencies will achieve accrediting or the program will not be continued.

It should also be pointed out that times have changed since Poly had a non-accredited engineering program. Engineering Technology was established about fifteen years ago. It has taken over the education formerly carried out by non-accredited engineering programs. There is no room left for engineering programs which are not accredited.

In closing, "disapprobation of their colleagues in the liberal arts" is not new to engineering faculty. One hundred and fifty years ago, the first engineering schools were "Polytechnic Institutes" because engineering was not accepted in the colleges and universities.

*I apologize for the
"typos" and incorrect spellings
I did have time to proof read
after this was printed
Otto Danckw*