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Languages across the Curriculum. ERIC Digest.

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According to Lambert (1991), "We expend almost all of our national resources for foreign language learning on first-time, low-level language learning among high school and college students, then watch those minimal skills decay and disappear through lack of use or reinforcement." With the exception of students who major in languages or area studies, or who study abroad, college graduates in the United States typically possess less non-English language proficiency than they had when they entered college. Even students with advanced proficiency seldom develop bilingual skills and intercultural

knowledge sufficient to meet their professional career needs by the time they graduate. As a result, the United States chronically lacks the multilingual language proficiency it needs to function effectively across cultural boundaries (American Council on Education, 1989).

Although language instruction is widespread in the United States, it typically does not lead to a high degree of proficiency or specialization. Even colleges and universities that define language requirements for baccalaureate and graduate degrees by acquired proficiency rather than accumulated course credits (e.g., the University of Minnesota) fail to mandate continued use of those skills after students have demonstrated intermediate-level proficiency. To increase the potential for achieving advanced levels of proficiency, language use and development must not only expand in variety and cumulative effect but it must also mesh with student language needs and interests in a wide array of curricular specialties (Grandin in Shoenberg & Turlington, 1998). Students at all levels must have opportunities to employ their language skills for purposes of immediate and lifelong value.

After a decade and a half of development at small liberal arts colleges (Allen, Anderson, & Narvaez 1992; Jurasek in Krueger & Ryan, 1993), Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC, pronounced as the initials L-A-C) has emerged as a promising means to improve the cross-cultural knowledge and purpose-specific multilingual and intercultural skills of U.S. postsecondary students.

THE ORIGINS AND AIMS OF LANGUAGE ACROSS THE

CURRICULUMThe LAC movement follows the example set by the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement of the 1980s, which sought to use writing as a central learning tool in classes outside the English department. Rather than relegating writing instruction to classes in literature or composition, WAC provides advice and assistance to students for the inculcation of the skills needed for writing in each curricular specialty. Similarly, LAC works with faculty to identify the specific vocabulary and genres that students need in order to function effectively in another language in their respective disciplines (Fichera & Straight, 1997).

LAC also draws upon the content-based language instruction movement of the 1990s (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Krueger & Ryan, 1993; Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Instruction that emphasizes purposeful comprehension and communicative production yields superior receptive and expressive accuracy, complexity, and fluency. In brief, students who learn language for a purpose learn it better.

LAC aims to facilitate the use of languages in a variety of meaningful contexts and to motivate and reward students for using their multilingual skills in every class they take at

each level in the university curriculum, thus preparing them for the cross-cultural and multilingual demands and opportunities of a global society (Consortium for Languages Across the Curriculum, 1996).

DESIGN VARIANTS IN LAC PROGRAMMING

To respond to the complex realities of student and faculty competencies, curricular and institutional priorities, and individual and group interests and needs, LAC takes a wide variety of forms (see Adams, 1996; Ryan & Riley in Shoenberg & Turlington, 1998; Straight, 1994). For example, even when focused exclusively on written rather than spoken language, the materials usable in an LAC course run a wide gamut. At the high end, students grapple with primary documents and scholarly texts they would otherwise read only in translation. At the low end, they exercise their developing analytical skills on mass-media items from which they can obtain facts and unique perspectives relating to the LAC course topic.
Likewise, the extent of language use varies greatly, from just a few LAC reading assignments sprinkled through a course, with no listening, speaking, or writing in the second language, to exclusive employment of the language in readings, lectures, discussion, and all written work.

Similarly, LAC personnel may consist of (1) single faculty members who choose to modify courses in an LAC direction, (2) a partnership between language and non-language faculty to devise joint courses, pairs of linked courses, or LAC components for existing courses, or (3) international graduate students who prepare substitute or supplementary assignments in any number of languages known to LAC participants in a course and then discuss these assignments with students outside of the regular class meetings. Any of these may function either in isolation or with the guidance and support of LAC-experienced faculty and staff.

Assignment of credit and assessment of learning also take varying forms as a function of whether a given LAC course focuses exclusively on language use or, if not, how it defines and measures its desired language-instruction outcomes. Thus, some LAC courses count both as language and non-language courses, while others divide the credit between the two. Some count only as non-language courses, while others provide a zero-credit, no-letter-grade (pass-only) transcript entry for students selecting the LAC option in a course.

Some LAC courses attend only to the content-enrichment value of LAC assignments, welcome any interested student, structure assignments to make them accessible to elementary or elementary-plus readers (see ILR, n.d.), use the LAC language for reading and perhaps a little listening but no required speaking or writing, and do not assess language-skill improvement for grading purposes. At the other extreme, LAC can adopt strict enrollment criteria (for example, only students who have completed 4-6 semesters of college-level language study; no native speakers allowed) and gauge

language-skill gain as a component of grading.

LAC programming has taken many different forms in response to varying needs, priorities, strengths, resources, values, and curricular possibilities (see e.g., Allen & Anderson in Straight, 1994).

LAC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

LAC Learning Materials. The identification and preparation of materials for use by LAC-participating students typically take considerable time and effort. Only rarely will the course-specific purposes of LAC and the language skills of participating students make it appropriate to use textbooks and other such scholar-produced resources aimed at a college-level audience of native speakers of the target language. At one extreme, for example, the most appropriate materials for courses in environmental studies, international business, or theatre may best consist of mass-media items, such as advertisements, news stories, entertainment reviews, editorials, or commercial Websites to which students can apply their course acquired concepts and analytical skills, and from which they can glean course-specific intercultural insights. At the other extreme, for a course in biology, history, or literature, students may read original versions of works they read in translation, primary historical documents, or technical reference sources to obtain information and intertextual comparative insights not otherwise accessible.
Whatever the nature of the materials, whether print, audio, video, or Web-based, construction of LAC assignments around them can pose sizeable challenges. Unless participants have a very high level of proficiency, they usually need background materials or specific references to other assigned course materials in order to understand the context in which the assigned material was created and how to apply course-specific ideas to it. At a minimum, they need a set of study questions and a brief glossary to help them deal effectively with the material.

Faculty Roles. Because of the long-standing separation of the study and use of languages from the rest of the postsecondary curriculum, LAC makes unfamiliar demands on departments and on individual faculty (Straight & Fichera in Shoenberg & Turlington, 1998). Non-language faculty may fear that the educational purposes of their courses will suffer with the addition of an LAC component. Language faculty may fear that the inculcation of high-level language skills will suffer when LAC puts languages into the service of specialized study outside of the literary, cultural, and linguistic domains long associated with languages in the general-education and language-specialist curricula.

Student Motivation. Students likewise may have difficulty fitting LAC into their conception of how to structure their college education. Not only do even the native speakers among them lack confidence in their ability to apply intermediate-level language skills to good academic purpose, they see little potential payoff for taking the

LAC plunge. It seldom fulfills any general-education or major requirement, and it bears no widely trumpeted connection to career opportunities.

Curricular Placement. The requirement-filling value of LAC arguably depends upon the emergence of new curricular components in which LAC plays an integral component. International tracks in existing majors, international or area-studies certificates, minors or majors, and honors and study-abroad programs of various sorts could quite reasonably accept or require enrollment in LAC courses. Similarly, career planning and placement offices could highlight careers in artistic, commercial, diplomatic, and other fields in which high-level bilinguality would open up exciting employment opportunities.

External Forces. Perhaps the greatest incentives to and resources for the expansion of LAC come from outside of our individual colleges and universities. The global deployment of multinational teams in commerce, industry, research, and the arts favor the use of collaborative, multilingual learning to prepare our graduates for the workplace. The growing multilingualism of our student bodies and of such things as the World Wide Web provide both the reason and the capacity for greatly enhanced intercultural, multilingual learning, while increasing numbers of international students possess the linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary skills and knowledge that we can employ as a powerful component of university teaching. Partnerships with burgeoning universities abroad promise two-way multilingual educational opportunities of unprecedented richness.

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This Digest reflects countless conversations with Ellen H. Badger, co-originator of Binghamton's LxC program; Marilyn Gaddis Rose, founding associate director of LxC; and Virginia M. Fichera, founder of the SUNY College at Oswego's LAC program.

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