TO: L&S College Curriculum Committee members

FROM: Liz Hachten for the FL sub-committee

DATE: October 27, 2010

RE: Preliminary report on foreign language placement and staffing

Last spring, the Curriculum Committee asked Peter Hoff, Trudi Witonsky, and Liz Hachten to gather more information about the foreign language placement and staffing implications of the proposals to strengthen the B.A. foreign language requirement. Using data generated by the Registrar’s office, we were able to examine the current patterns of language study among B.A. candidates as well as the university-wide foreign language placement test results. A summary of the placement test results broken down by high school units completed is appended to this memo. In addition, the two spreadsheets containing the raw data from these queries will be posted on the CCC website.

Our preliminary analysis of these data has led us to the following conclusions:

* For UW-W students, two units of high school foreign language study are not equivalent to two semesters of college-level coursework. In fact, 92% of students with 2 units of HS foreign language placed into either the first or second semester college-level classes.
* A significant percentage of UW-W students who have completed 4 or more units of high school foreign language are not able to place into third semester or high college-level courses (see attached charts for details). This fact suggests that revising the current requirement to require four units of high school foreign language. instead of the current two units, will not ensure that B.A. candidates have achieved a level of competence equivalent to completion of two semesters in college.
* In September 2009, there were 1166 B.A. candidates in L&S, the vast majority of whom (~950 or ~80%) are currently waived out of the FL requirement. Relatively few of these 950 students currently take a FL class at UW-W (~200 in Fall 2009 had enrolled in at least one FL class at UWW). Therefore, we must extrapolate from the university placement data to project how many of these ~750 students would have to take one or two semesters of FL if the college requires waiver or completion of a second semester course. These calculations suggest that demand would rise by ~ 80 students per year for first semester FL classes and by ~125 students per year for second-semester FL classes. In other words, at least 3 additional sections of first-semester FL classes and 4 additional sections of second-semester FL classes would have to be offered each year to meet the additional demand. Note that these calculations are based on many assumptions that may or may not be correct and thus should be seen as approximations only.
* Based on these calculations, last year’s projection that approximately 2 additional FTE in Foreign Languages would be required if BA students could no longer use HS units to satisfy the requirement is reasonable; this new staffing would be divided between Spanish and the other languages. The new Spanish tenure-track position that was just approved by the provost will go a long ways towards meeting this increased staffing. Also, Foreign Languages would need an additional classroom and more office space to support this initiative.
* There are a number of other issues that would need to be worked out if the requirement is changed, including the logistics of administering FL placement tests to larger number of students and the development of placement tests in languages other than Spanish, French, and German.