

Languages across the Curriculum

A Response to Internationalization in Foreign Language Education

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Introduction

Educators and administrators in post-secondary institutions are all-too familiar with trends in educational reform. For better or for worse, we often turn to reform to heal our academic ailments, foreign language educators included. The current status of foreign language instruction in the United States is such that curricular reform is in an excellent position that can lead to effective and innovative solutions to some of our greatest challenges.

A trend towards internationalization on many campuses has been a primary force motivating the need for reform in foreign language education. The traditional curriculum has not been meeting the challenges that internationalization presents. Therefore, faculty and administrators must look to new approaches to curricular design in foreign language programs.

Among the most prevalent efforts are those that integrate foreign language instruction with other disciplines. As noted at a 2008 conference in Washington, D. C., there is a call to “restructure university language departments to better integrate language learning across the curriculum” (Wasley, 2008).

The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the concept of Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) in postsecondary instruction. I will first define key terms relevant to the discussion of LAC and then describe the elements of LAC along with a number of its curricular variations. I will then discuss one of the major forces behind the implementation of LAC: internationalization.

Results from a review of the literature

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show that LAC initiatives across the country have been successfully implemented, although there are still numerous challenges to address. This article therefore examines the major implications of LAC and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Key Terms

Internationalization of curriculum has continued to be a prevailing initiative in many U.S. institutions of higher education over recent decades. Although there has not been agreement on a set definition of internationalization, many institutions have developed something similar to what Knight (2004) describes: “[internationalization is] the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 11). It is a campus-wide movement that more often than not relies on foreign language departments to establish and maintain programming.

In response to the movement to internationalize, many foreign language departments have developed interdisciplinary approaches that both satisfy internal needs and reach out to the broader campus community. An interdisciplinary approach is “a process or program designed to answer questions, resolve problems or issues, or examine a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately through a single discipline or field or study” (Gaff & Ratcliff, 1997). In the context of internationalizing curriculum, this approach may also contain elements of integrating multiculturalism and multilingualism across and among disciplines.

LAC is a primary example of curricular reform involving an international, interdisciplinary approach. LAC distinguishes itself among the other interdisciplinary ap-

proaches because it uses a second language in disciplinary settings outside of the foreign language department. Described by Adams (1996), “selected courses ordinarily taught in English in fields as diverse as art history, Latin American politics, anthropology, and philosophy are taught entirely or partly in another language.”

Brown University expands on this definition of LAC on its website by stating that “LAC encourages students and faculty to view their studies in a global context and to venture beyond their own cultural and linguistic borders in order to gain additional perspectives and additional knowledge” (Brown University, 2010).

LAC programs can take many forms because they are highly dependent on institutional goals, needs, and resources. Among the programs falling under LAC, three of the most commonly implemented models include: Linkage Through Language (LTL); Language for Specific/Instrumental Purposes (LSP/LIP); and Applied Foreign Language Component (AFLC).

These three models are described below based on their application at certain institutions. It is important to keep in mind that these models may vary based on the context in which they are implemented.

LTL programs typically have three components:

1. *The export model:* a fourth hour of foreign language is added to a normal three-hour section of a humanities or social science course. In the fourth hour, selected texts that highlight some aspect of the discipline course are presented and discussed in the target language;
2. *The import model:* faculty outside of the foreign language department who are proficient in a second language serve as guest lecturers in the language class and present some aspect of their discipline; and

3. *The co-curricular enhancement model:* campus-wide events, such as exhibits, lectures and film series are thematically connected to other courses being offered during a given semester. (Kecht, 1999)

LSP or LIP has existed in the form of content-based instruction for several decades now and is based on the idea that foreign language instruction can be effectively taught with a specific or vocational application in mind (Boufof-Bastick, 2001). Medical Spanish is a common example of an LSP/LIP program, in which students, often pre-med or nursing, learn Spanish specifically for its application in the medical field.

The AFLC model was first created in 1989 at Saint Olaf College, where students who are at an intermediate proficiency level in a foreign language are allowed to take courses in the humanities, behavioral and natural sciences, and mathematics with an AFLC. Students substitute texts in a foreign language for a number of assigned English-language course readings. They attend weekly seminars in their foreign language of study in order to integrate the material they read to the English-language course and also to practice the foreign language. These seminars are team-taught by a foreign language instructor and the other course instructor (St. Olaf College, 2010).

Examples from the Literature

Internationalization is a movement driven mostly by demographic and market factors. With an increase in international trade between the U.S. and countries abroad, as well as expanding multicultural and multilingual communities within U.S. borders, internationalization is not likely to diminish in the decades to come. Universities that make an attempt to internationalize will likely be at the forefront of higher education curriculum reform (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Kelm & Teichler, 2007; Knight, 2007; Voght & Schaub, 1992).

Leaders in many professions now realize that fluency in a foreign language and multicultural sensitivity are essential in their fields if the United States is to participate effectively in this global community and if we expect to maintain our standard of living in the context of increasing global competition and cooperation. (Voght & Schaub, 1992)

LAC initiatives are increasingly meeting the needs of our institutions and global community by integrating language instruction with disciplines outside of the foreign language department.

In 1979, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) offered the first undergraduate program in the U.S. to combine requirements in advanced foreign language proficiency, area studies, international business, economics, and practical training (Voght & Schaub, 1992). Faculty and administration at EMU saw the need for globalizing business education and sought the cooperation of the department of foreign languages in order to effectively create new curricula. The success at EMU spurred funding from the U.S. Department of Education and the Exxon Education Foundation to make it possible for other LAC programs to develop throughout the country. In addition to this funding, private funding and the passage of the Omnibus Trade Act of 1988 helped to create Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERS) that serve as resources for institutions interested in internationalizing curriculum (Voght & Schaub, 1992).

In order to offer a more economical way of easing into curricular reform, one-unit, foreign language seminars or practicum are a common LAC initiative (Swaffar, 1999). At Rice University, a need to “prepare tomorrow’s graduates for the challenges of an international labor market” prompted the faculty to increase language and culture studies (Kecht, 1999). Freshman can take one-credit, one-hour, language and culture awareness courses, which are team-taught by faculty members from various disciplines. According to Kecht (1999), the goal is to prove to students that language learning is worth their while and that study or work abroad can be integrated into their normal studies. This program has established an important means by which communication and connections can be made through a faculty advisory board, a student council, and an outreach committee which foster connections with outside businesses, industry, and government agencies.

A third example of an effective LAC program comes from the University of Connecticut in the form of the Eurotech program and LTL. Eurotech is an international engineering program offering a B.S. in engineering and a B.A. in German over the course of five years. The program integrates language study and engineering as well as study abroad in Germany, field trips to German companies in Connecticut, interviews with German teaching assistants in engineering, group projects with German engineering students, and a summer internship with German companies in Connecticut (University of Connecticut,

2010). The program was born out of the collaboration between faculty in two disciplines, foreign languages and engineering. As stated on the university’s website,

U.S. companies operating abroad and foreign companies operating in the U.S. value engineers who understand and are able to bridge cultural differences. The study of a foreign language and culture adds these skills, thus enhancing your career prospects.

As a means of internationalizing curriculum through an interdisciplinary approach, LAC has proven itself highly successful. Through collaboration between faculty in foreign language and other departments, numerous interdisciplinary programs ranging from one-unit, weekly seminars to five-year, combination B.A. and B.S. degree programs have been born. However, with each successful initiative come new challenges that need to be addressed if LAC is to attain wide-spread institutionalization.

Implications

Despite the growing number of examples of successful attempts to internationalize curriculum through LAC, there are still a number of challenges to be met before LAC will be more readily adopted. Of the obstacles, the most pertinent is the faculty. In their study of faculty perceptions of implementing internationalization, Dewey and Duff (2009) identified four primary concerns: lack of organization or information on how to internationalize curricula, lack of funding for initiatives, problematic administrative policies that create disincentives for participating in such initiatives, and lack of support staff for carrying out initiatives.

In addition to these findings, there are at least two other constraints to implementing internationalization initiatives. First, many faculty do not see foreign language as applicable to more than a handful of disciplines. Second, some faculty feel unprepared to teach courses outside of their discipline. Not surprisingly, with limited incentives, few faculty members are willing to retool in order to participate in LAC efforts.

One of the myths that can keep academic departments from entering into collaborative LAC projects is the belief that the study of foreign languages is applicable only to a minimal number of disciplines. Clearly, some disciplines lend themselves more easily to internationalization than others—for example, language study,

area studies, and international studies. Johnston and Spalding (1997) point out that still others, such as geography and anthropology, can also easily transcend national boundaries.

Other fields of study, like archeology, botany, linguistics, zoology, entomology, and a number of comparative specialties in the social science and humanities also typically extend their knowledge bases beyond our national borders. In contrast, highly abstract fields, such as physics, mathematics, and computer science, tend to be less internationally minded, although there certainly are opportunities to make contact with the work of colleagues in other countries (Johnston & Spalding, 1997).

Examples of LAC involving less obviously international common disciplines, such as physics, are not easy to find. However, there is hope that with experimentation and dissemination of that experimentation, faculty can gain a greater understanding of how to make meaningful connections between these disciplines and foreign languages.

This myth set aside, the next challenge to be addressed is the need for incentives (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Saiya & Hayward, 2003). Understandably, if faculty are not fully committed to and supported in their endeavors, no programming will be successful in the long term. Often with reform movements, faculty are asked to invest overtime in order to get a pilot program started. Depending on the extent of the LAC, some faculty may even be required to retool or learn for the first time material in a discipline outside of their own (Tesser, 1999). An example might be a Spanish faculty member and a management faculty member who team-teach a course on "Business in Latin America." If there are no other incentives outside of the opportunity to innovate curricula, few faculty members are likely to continue their commitment to such a project beyond one semester.

One of the keys, then, to successfully integrating language studies across disciplinary boundaries is to support faculty in their interest in LAC efforts and provide them with opportunities to prepare themselves for the challenge of getting involved with another discipline. For example, faculty at Rice University who are involved in LAC are given on-going training in the areas they are interested in teaching (Kecht, 1999). At other campuses, faculty members are awarded released time in order to collaborate with colleagues outside of their disciplines on future LAC courses. A major aspect of the EMU model is the

emphasis on professional development for faculty involved in international business, for those teaching culture and language for business, and for business educators wanting to internationalize their courses and programs. Summer seminars are among the primary means for providing additional training for faculty (Voght & Schaub, 1992).

Potential for Future Research

Future research should explore student outcomes as a result of participating in LAC programs. Aside from data on student experiences from the Saint Olaf College website, scholarship on LAC programs sheds little light on the impact on students. Specifically, there seems to be a lack of insight into students' perceived benefits from having participated in a LAC program.

Neither is there mention of assessing and comparing students' improvement in language proficiency from LAC and from traditional programs. It would seem that a reform movement striving for acceptance and implementation in academia should address the student from a number of directions. Two recommendations are: first, a study of student perceptions of success of the various models of LAC; and second, a comparative study that would look into language proficiency gains in LAC and non-LAC courses. The comparison of the two groups would likely highlight the benefits of participating in LAC programs.

Conclusion

Language across the Curriculum is a viable option for institutions seeking to internationalize the curriculum. A foundation has been built by many successful models across the country, some of which have been mentioned here. What will come of this movement and other interdisciplinary approaches to educational reform remains to be seen.

If campus communities will support LAC initiatives by supplying faculty with the incentives and resources required for success in such endeavors, the future for further development will be secured. Without support, faculty will have little motivation to collaborate on projects. In order to motivate faculty to integrate language study, incentives, as well as disincentives need to be addressed and reviewed. Promotion, merit pay, study or travel abroad, visiting instructors from abroad, faculty exchanges, joint appointments in both tra-

ditional departments and interdisciplinary international programs are all potentially useful strategies. Also, tenure and promotion committees should value scholarship that is internationally focused or comparative in nature and not consider it only as time away from more traditional research and teaching endeavors.

Research providing additional insight into student outcomes must also be a priority for faculty and administrators in order to ensure the success and credibility of LAC programs.

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Promising Practices

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