

How should Foreign Languages be treated in the Common Core?

This brief provides options for including foreign language in the 30-credit Common Core. Background information is also provided, including current foreign language requirements, mechanisms for granting waivers to students with foreign language proficiency, and foreign language course-taking patterns.

Options regarding the placement of foreign languages

The Steering Committee has several options with regard to the placement of foreign language in the 30-credit Common Core:

- Not include foreign language in the 30-credit Common Core. Senior colleges could decide to require foreign language as part of the 12-credit College Option.
- Include foreign language in a category with other components. For example, a Humanities/Fine Arts/Foreign Language area or Social Science/Foreign Language area could be devised. This would leave individual colleges free to decide if they want foreign language to be required of all students, if they do not want to make it a requirement at all, or if they want to leave it a personal option for students fulfilling courses in the area.
 - Under this option, students deemed proficient in a foreign language and thus exempted from the requirement would be required to complete other courses in the area. For example, language proficient students could take an additional social science or humanities course, study a new language, or complete a higher level language course.
- Include foreign language as its own category, thereby requiring all CUNY students to take foreign language as part of the Common Core.
 - Students deemed proficient in a foreign language would be required to study a new language or complete a higher level language course.

Current foreign language requirements

Almost all CUNY senior colleges require some level of foreign language instruction. NYCCT is an exception and Medgar Evers and SPS allow students to choose between foreign language and diversity courses. Some senior colleges do not require foreign languages of all students. CSI and City College exempt those in Bachelor of Science programs. Students in programs such as Engineering and Nursing often have exemptions. CUNY community colleges are less likely to require foreign languages than senior colleges. Of degree programs analyzed at the community colleges, fewer than half required a foreign language.

Student waivers for foreign language proficiency

Criteria for determining whether individual students may be waived from a foreign language requirement vary. Colleges grant waivers based on high school course taking, Regents or AP exam scores, and/or performance on competency exams administered at the college.

For example, Brooklyn students have a three-semester language requirement and are exempt if they have completed three years of foreign language in high school and passed the Regents Level 3. Hunter students, who have a four-semester language requirement, are exempt if they have completed 4 years of foreign language in high school or passed an AP exam.

Students deemed proficient at most CUNY colleges are exempted from the foreign language requirement. At Baruch, though, students in the Weissman School who are deemed proficient must fulfill alternate requirements, such as taking literature courses in the target language, taking more advanced language courses, or taking a new language.

Foreign language course-taking patterns

The attached table shows the proportion of CUNY baccalaureate graduates who took at least one foreign language class at the senior college from which they graduated. The table excludes students who majored in foreign languages or who graduated from a foreign language teacher education program. It shows that the percentage of students taking at least one foreign language course at their senior college ranges from a high of 73% at Hunter to a low of 43.5% at Brooklyn (excluding NYCCT, which does not have a foreign language requirement). Other data show that students who took at least one foreign language course often took more than one. This suggests that many of those who took none might have been exempted due to having attained a significant level of fluency, perhaps from home knowledge of another language (as reflected in being exempted from multiple courses).

Table 1
Foreign Language Course Taking by Baccalaureate Graduates, by Admission Type*: 2009-10

College	Entered College of Graduation as First-time Freshman			Entered College of Graduation as Transfer			Total		
	All Students	Taking at least one Foreign		All Students	Taking at least one Foreign		All Students	Taking at least one Foreign	
	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%
Baruch	1,138	562	49.4	1,412	557	39.4	2,550	1,119	43.9
Brooklyn	831	315	37.9	1,313	617	47.0	2,144	932	43.5
City	696	365	52.4	844	329	39.0	1,540	694	45.1
Hunter	1,044	821	78.6	1,378	948	68.8	2,422	1,769	73.0
John Jay	526	240	45.6	825	375	45.5	1,351	615	45.5
Lehman	448	398	88.8	1,082	348	32.2	1,530	746	48.8
Medgar Evers	19	19	100.0	124	60	48.4	143	79	55.2
NYCCT	77	8	10.4	204	9	4.4	281	17	6.0
Queens	883	494	55.9	1,656	702	42.4	2,539	1,196	47.1
Staten Island	206	119	57.8	677	367	54.2	883	486	55.0
York	244	216	88.5	480	206	42.9	724	422	58.3
Baccalaureate Total	6,112	3,557	58.2	9,995	4,518	45.2	16,107	8,075	50.1

*Excludes students who graduated from a foreign language program or a foreign language teacher education program, as well as a small number of students whose type of entry into the degree-granting college could not be determined, and graduates from the School of Professional Studies' Online BA program. Students are grouped by degree granting college.