

## **LANGUAGE AT QUEENS COLLEGE**

December 13, 2011

### **Why study a second language?**

#### Some history

- Direct access to knowledge (no translation)  
Western knowledge written in French, German, Italian, Latin, and Greek (literature, great texts, etc.)
- Language and communication (spying, talking, cultural studies)
- Language and cognition (cognition, thought, and culture)
- Global reality

#### Students

- Direct access to a second culture  
See and experience the world differently  
Confront issues of diversity, multiculturalism, the problem of translation...  
Cultural literacy
- A performance-based subject (talking, acting, pretending to be someone you are not)  
Develop abilities in the second language  
Increase abilities in English, raises self-awareness of English  
Confront issues of language modes: e.g. speaking at home versus formal written and oral expression
- Study of a second language is orderly, sequential  
Start simply and build up (as with other performance-based studies).  
Real accomplishment after one year, two years (even if actual fluency takes longer)  
Requires discipline  
“Difficult” because it is unfamiliar, not because it is inherently difficult in any way that makes sense  
“Difficult” because it can make people uncomfortable
  - Puts things in perspective (e.g. more English learners in China than people in the US)

#### Community

- The value of other cultures
- Direct access to parts of the community otherwise not part of the dominant culture  
Community programs and services  
Language minorities  
Dying languages
- Maintaining the majors in languages taught in high schools as part of Queens College’s public service mission

## **What we do**

- Majors in Chinese (4), French (2), German, Ancient Greek, Hebrew, Italian (3), Latin, Russian, Spanish (1)
- Additional Minors in Arabic, Modern Greek, Japanese (5), Korean
- New Minors in Chinese for Business, Spanish for Business (i.e. language minors for students in particular majors)
- Part of a number of majors: Art History, Comparative Literature, East Asian Studies, Greek and Byzantine Studies, Linguistics, Middle Eastern Studies, Music, etc.
- Fall 2011: 2342 students in language classes (twelfth)
- Average language class size is 20
- Teacher training (NCATE certification) in Chinese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, all languages taught in the NYC public schools
- Teaching is effective: all SEYS students in French, Italian, and Spanish attain “advanced” proficiency on the Oral Proficiency Exam (OPI)
- Students going on to graduate education where language is needed

## **LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS AT QUEENS COLLEGE**

### **Before September 1981**

- General requirements included: *English, Reading, Mathematics, Distributional*.  
“Students will be required to take 24 credits of distributional requirements: eight credits (distributed among at least two departments) in each of the three academic divisions of the College” (1979/80 *Bulletin*, p.57)
- No language requirement, although one finds notes such as: “Candidates preparing for graduate study should be aware that doctoral programs in English often require reading ability in at least two language (French, German, Italian, Latin, and Greek are preferred)...” (p.192)

### **From September 1981**

- General requirements included: *English, Reading, Mathematics, Foreign Language, LASAR*.
- *Foreign Language*  
“All baccalaureate students must attain a knowledge of a foreign language equivalent to three semesters of study at the college level.” Exceptions are granted for (i) completing the third level of foreign language instruction at the high school level, (ii) passing the Regents exam or having finished high school or any advanced degree in a non-English speaking country, (iii) passing a proficiency exam (currently achieve 10 of 12 points on the NYU Language Proficiency Exam), (iv) taking a language course numbered 203 or higher at Queens. About half of all entering students are exempted one way or another.

## **Moving forward**

Can we agree that the study of a second language is a worthwhile exercise?

How do we make this happen?

- Do what we do now  
Assign 9 of our 12 credits to language  
Exempt as we do now
- Broader but shallower  
Assign 3 of our 12 credits to language  
At an appropriate level  
Required of all  
Exemptions only for study at the community college-level  
In effect, require a college-level class in a foreign language
- In between  
Require (native) students to attain a two-semester competency in a foreign language. For those who do not, require that the Global Studies component of the Flexible Core be satisfied with one or two semesters of a foreign language.  
This is explicitly allowed in some of the explanatory material that is accompanying Pathways.
- Language and cognition  
Assign 3 of our 12 credits to courses that require that (some of) the following:
  - Differentiate types of language and appreciate their structures
  - Appreciate what is lost or gained in translations among languages
  - Relate language, thought, and culture
  - Compare natural languages, formal languages, and logic
  - Understand the processes involved in learning languages
- Language and speaking  
Create a “Speech (S)” overlay—to go along with Writing (W), A/QR (Quantitative Reasoning), T (Technology)...  
Overlays are not part of Pathways  
The overlay would be linked to one-third of the course assessment  
Require student to take two courses in each  
Do not allow overlap between overlays or between overlays and Pathways  
Well-structured language classes as well as courses in dramatic arts, public speaking would satisfy “S” obviously. Others might as well (depending on how they are assessed).