

Advising and Modern Languages at Union College

The faculty members of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures acknowledge the relevance of strengthening the advising program at Union, and deem the role of the advisor essential to the student's access to precious opportunities during his / her academic formation, and later on in life. With this handout, we hope to provide some guidance to academic advisors regarding the study of languages and cultures at Union.

We would like to stress to all academic advisors the nationwide interest in and demand for courses in foreign languages and cultures by students, regardless of their academic major, as a response to shifting needs in professional fields, in global markets and economies, and even posed by our national population diversity. These trends are leading students to combine the study of languages & cultures with their main academic focus. Students in the medical professions and the sciences (e.g. biology, geology, computer sciences), the social sciences, engineering, and the humanities are increasingly opting for the study of languages to solidify their academic formation, and to diversify their future career options. As recent studies and feature newspaper articles point out clearly to teachers, parents and employers, students with a background in language or cultural studies do better and have higher acceptance rates at graduate and professional schools (medicine, law, MBA, education, international relations, media, etc.).

Students who select languages and cultures as their academic major are pursuing diverse paths at the graduate and professional levels.

Guidelines to advisors:

1) **Advise students to start or to continue the study of a language as soon as they enter Union College.** Students must be aware of the important role that language or cultural competency may play in their future careers or in the diversity of their professional paths.

- The likelihood for students to combine the study of a language with any other academic field (Economics, Political Science, Biology, etc.) without scheduling problems increases IF they continue / start the study of a language upon entering Union College. At times, students who start their study of a language in their junior or senior year (especially those who did not declare a major early on) cannot opt to declare a double major or an interdepartmental major with Modern Languages and Literatures. Sometimes, by the time a student declares a major, he / she already has no "room" for many courses outside the major.
- The earlier a student starts or continues the study of a language in college, the better the chance to achieve native-like linguistic fluency and a strong cultural competency.
- Students with previous language experience (in high school) must make an appointment for a placement meeting with a MLL faculty before the pre-registration meeting at the Registrar's.

2) Tell students to familiarize themselves with the various offerings in terms abroad with language components (Brazil, China, France, Germany, Mexico, Spain, and Vietnam) upon entering Union. These programs have language courses as prerequisites (or, as is the case for the program in Japan, students are strongly advised to take some courses in Japanese before traveling). It is not uncommon for students to realize late in their academic career that they cannot fulfill the prerequisites in order to participate in one of these programs. For details, please contact Prof. Bill Thomas (International Programs Office).

3) Inform students about the various interdisciplinary programs with which the Department of Modern Languages has academic ties. Depending on their academic concentration and future career inclinations, students can declare double majors, interdepartmental majors, or minors in such programs as East Asian Studies and Latin American & Caribbean Studies.

4) Please do not lead a student to take a language course as an easy option to counterbalance the level of difficulty of courses in other disciplines. Language pedagogy has evolved greatly since many of us (advisors) took language courses at the college level, and has little in common with the study of language at the high school level. The successful study of any language requires tremendous discipline and academic rigor. It enhances the development of critical thinking and analytic capabilities, and it strengthens the writing and communicative skills in the native tongue. Today, cultural literacy constitutes a noteworthy element in the study of any language. In the language classroom, students go beyond the grammar and conjugation drills of the old days. They learn to analyze linguistic input and to adopt a communicative approach in the study of the language, deal with cultural artifacts, numerous reading and written assignments, and even take advantage of the numerous technological tools employed in the language classroom.

5) Encourage your advisees to seek the input of a faculty member in our department when in need of more specific information regarding any of our programs, or to discuss the academic options for a student in relation to the study of a language. Please feel free to contact the Chair, who will gladly address your questions or refer you to a faculty member in the area of interest.

6) Be aware that most language sequences, especially at the beginner's level (100-level), start in the Fall term; the 100-level course in most languages is offered only in the Fall term.

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