I. GER in Foreign Languages at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Current General Education Requirement for Foreign Languages (Faculty Senate Document 1382, Section II.3):

Foreign language
This requirement is satisfied by:

1. completing, prior to enrollment at UWM, two years of high school level instruction in a single foreign language with passing grades; or
2. completing two semesters (minimum of six credits) of college level instruction in a single foreign language with passing grades; or
3. demonstrating foreign language ability equivalent to (2) above by means of a satisfactory score on an approved placement, proficiency, departmental or other appropriate examination; or
4. satisfying the APCC-approved alternative GER Foreign Language Requirement, if any, stipulated by the student’s particular degree program.

Completion of the Foreign Language Requirement is a prerequisite for graduation.

II. Assessment of GER Foreign Language Requirement

A. GER Outcomes Assessment Task Force Charge

1. Identify measurable learning goals for the General Education Requirements at UWM drawing from Faculty Document no. 1382.
2. Determine what assessment is currently being done and what measures are being used by departments.
3. Develop an overall plan for assessing and evaluating general education.
4. Identify how we are communicating the value of general education to our students and other constituents.

B. Selected institutions (Universities and Language Resource Centers) reviewed for General Education Criteria in Foreign Language

1. ACTFL-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
   www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm – 7
2. Language Testing International
   http://www.languagetesting.com/scale_acad.htm
3. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA)
   http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/MLPA.html
4. Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR)
   http://clear.msu.edu/newsletter/spring00/paradigms.htm
5. Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington, D.C.  
http://www.cal.org/resources/faqs/RGOs/assessment.html#search
6. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.  
http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed304024.html
7. University of Minnesota  
http://www.class.umn.edu/degree_requirements/FAQs_About_the_Second_Language_Requirement.html
8. University of Wisconsin-Madison  
http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened/
9. Arizona State University  
http://www.asu.edu/clas/fhd/fhdadvisinglanguage.htm
10. Columbia University – Columbia College  
http://ccc.college.columbia.edu/students/academics/core/fl.php
11. University of Oregon  
http://admissions.uoregon.edu/apply/secondlanguage.htm
12. Marquette University  
http://www.marquette.edu/fola/undergraduate/requirements.shtml
13. University of Michigan  
http://www.lsa.umich.edu/saa/information/degrees/language.html
14. Michigan State  
https://ntweb11.ais.msu.edu/FLPlacement/about.html
15. Northwestern University- College of Arts and Sciences  
http://www.cas.northwestern.edu/advising/lang.html

C. Initial findings on General Education criteria for foreign language at other institutions

1. Most universities and colleges do not set assessment goals and outcomes for General Education Foreign Language study, other than passing two to four semesters of study in a single language. (They do, however, have detailed assessment tools for language majors, as does UWM.)
2. The language requirement in many universities varies according to the school or college. Some schools, such as engineering, require fewer semesters of language; on the other hand, many Colleges of Arts and Sciences require four semesters.
3. When there is mention of learning goals, the standard measure referred to are the proficiency guidelines established by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), which are also used at UWM.
4. A few universities, such as the University of Minnesota, have developed proficiency examinations and require students to attain a level of proficiency in addition to, or in lieu of, taking a certain number of courses. The universities that have been able to develop and implement proficiency testing (in addition to placement testing) for the general education requirement have benefited from large federal Title VI grants, making them “National Language Resource Centers.” A leading example is CARLA, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, at the University of Minnesota.
D. Learning outcomes of competency requirement in foreign language

1. Two years of high school level instruction in a single foreign language with passing grades

Allowing students to fulfill the foreign language requirement by taking two years of FL in high school is a shortcoming of the current General Education Requirements for the following reasons:

a. School districts vary in quantity and quality of FL instruction at the secondary level, and there is no provision in the current FL requirement for assessing the competencies of students that have fulfilled the requirement in this way.

b. Based on our data from placement exam results, two years of high school is not equivalent to two semesters at UWM. Students with two years of high school do not place into third semester and often place into first semester.

2. Two semesters (minimum of six credits) of college level instruction in a single foreign language with passing grades

The learning outcomes of this course of study are the following:

a. **Language proficiency**
   Learner will develop intermediate-low proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing in the target language, according to the proficiency guidelines established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). See Appendix A (Speaking and Writing guidelines available at [http://www.actfl.org/](http://www.actfl.org/)).

Note: Achievement of this proficiency level is dependent upon the number of hours of instruction in relation to the difficulty of the language, as illustrated in the “Summary of ACE Credit Recommendations for official ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Ratings.” See Appendix B (available at [http://www.actfl.org/](http://www.actfl.org/)).

The following is a brief description of this level of proficiency in the four skills:

**Listening:** Learner can understand important everyday utterances such as phatic language (social and emotional signs of linguistic communication), directions, greetings, numbers, etc. Learner can listen for overall meaning of longer (paragraph or more) passages. Comprehension areas include such basic needs as getting meals, lodging and transportation, and receiving simple instructions and routine commands.
**Speaking:** Learner can communicate minimally at the sentence-level, speaking in the present tense on topics related to their own personal lives, or to basic survival in the target culture, where the listener is a very sympathetic native speaker. Learner can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain face-to-face conversation, although in a highly restricted manner and without much linguistic accuracy.

**Reading:** Learner can fully understand short, sentence-level writing, particularly when sentences have a subject-verb-object word order, without subordinate clauses. For longer texts (paragraph or more), learners can glean overall meaning and most important details. In languages that do not use the Roman alphabet, reading proficiency is limited to basic survival and social needs, and specially prepared material.

**Writing:** Learner has sufficient control of the writing system to meet limited practical needs, such as writing short messages, taking simple notes, creating statements or questions within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences on very familiar topics. Writing proficiency is more limited in non-alphabetic languages.

b. **Metalinguistic awareness**
Learner will develop an understanding of differences in grammar and syntax that distinguish languages, and of the intimate link between language and cultural meaning.

c. **Cross-cultural awareness**
Learner will develop sensitivity to world cultures and citizens and at the same time makes students aware of their own culture within the perspective of world cultures.

Note: All three of these learning outcomes are aligned with the 1996 National Standards for Foreign Language Learning ([http://www.actfl.org/](http://www.actfl.org/)) and Wisconsin’s 2001 Model Academic Standards for Foreign Languages ([http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/standards](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/standards)).

3. Satisfactory score on an approved placement, proficiency, departmental or other appropriate examination

Although the UW-System Placement Exam, which is available in French, German and Spanish, is not designed to measure language proficiency, it is used effectively to verify that a student has sufficient knowledge to place into
the third semester of language study at UWM. For the less commonly taught languages, individual programs have developed placement exams.

4. APCC-approved alternative GER Foreign Language requirement, if any, stipulated by the student’s particular degree program.

Proposed action: The APCC should consult the language programs before approving alternatives to the GER FL requirement.

E. Assessment of learning outcomes

1. Direct assessment

   a. Language proficiency
      Listening and speaking competencies are assessed on a daily basis within the classroom, through interactive activities. Listening comprehension is evaluated regularly on quizzes and exams, and both listening and speaking is evaluated through individual oral interviews. Students are given the opportunity to self-assess their participation in class and receive feedback from the instructor on this assessment.

      Reading and writing competencies are assessed regularly through homework assignments, compositions, quizzes and exams. Instructors evaluate improvement in writing through rewriting of compositions.

   b. Metalinguistic awareness
      No direct assessment at this time.
      Proposed action: Learners will be given the opportunity to reflect in English on similarities and differences between the grammar and syntax of English and that of the target language.

   c. Cross-cultural awareness
      No direct assessment at this time.
      Proposed action: Learners will be given the opportunity to reflect in English on similarities and differences between American culture and the culture(s) where the target language is spoken.

2. Indirect assessment

   a. End-of-semester course evaluations
      These evaluations elicit information from students on the effectiveness of various aspects of the course, including the use of the target language in the classroom, the assignments from the textbook, the use of the language laboratory, the techniques used by the instructor, the textbook and its ancillary materials, etc.
Proposed actions:

i. Students will evaluate the course at the mid-term point as well as at the end of the semester.
ii. Language departments will revise the current course evaluation form to better reflect the learning outcomes articulated above.

b. **Analysis of test results and grade distributions**
   In courses with multiple sections, group grading of midterm and final exams, resulting in discussion among instructors of the effectiveness of learning as reflected by the results of each section of the exam. The language coordinators analyze the grade distributions across sections and solicit feedback from instructors on the areas of learning that were problematic, with an eye toward assessing the effectiveness of learning and testing methods.

c. **Classroom observations**
   Teaching Assistants and Lecturers are regularly observed in the classroom by the Language Coordinator.

d. **Course meetings and TA practicum**
   The Language Coordinator meets regularly with TAs and lecturers to discuss problems that instructors are finding in the courses that they teach.

III. How assessment is used to improve instruction in the first-year language curriculum

A. **Direct Assessment**

1. **Language proficiency**
   Since listening and speaking proficiency are continuously practiced and assessed within the classroom setting, instructors are able to adapt classroom activities to meet the needs of students, based on their ability to understand and produce the language. The rewriting process of compositions also allows instructors to focus in class on recurring problems that are found in students’ writing.

B. **Indirect Assessment**

1. **End-of-semester course evaluations**
   Course evaluations are used to inform the instructor and the Language Coordinator about possible areas for improvement in teaching methods and materials, assignments, and activities.
2. **Analysis of test results and grade distributions**
   Instructors provide feedback to the Language Coordinator on segments of the exams where students had particular difficulty. In languages where the midterm and final exams are graded in groups, instructors share ideas on the difficulties that students had and report back to the Language Coordinator. This information is used to adjust the syllabus, allowing more time for certain topics, or to adjust learning goals. In addition, when developing the items and format of the midterm and final exams, individual instructors or groups of instructors consider the learning outcomes from previous semesters.

3. **Classroom observations**
   After each classroom observation, the instructor meets with the Language Coordinator to discuss what was observed, in an effort to improve the quality of instruction. In addition, instructors are encouraged to visit each other’s classes to learn different teaching methods.

4. **Course meetings, TA practicum, Orientation, and Methodology course**
   Instructors meet regularly with the Language Coordinator, in course meetings or during the TA practicum, to discuss problems and difficulties encountered in the classroom, in an effort to improve instruction. Since first and second semester language courses are taught almost exclusively by teaching assistants, the ongoing training of these instructors is extremely important in our efforts to improve instruction. This training includes a department orientation before the beginning of the fall semester (4 days) and the spring semester (1 day), a required 3-credit MAFLL core course on foreign language methodology and pedagogy (MAFLL 706) during the first semester of teaching, and a 1-credit practicum in each language.

**IV. Communicating the importance of FL as part of the GER curriculum**

   **A.** Within the classroom, the value of communicating in a foreign language is emphasized in the following ways:

   1. Use of the target language as the primary medium of communication
   2. Use of authentic materials in the target language, such as literature, news, advertisements, films, and music, to fully appreciate the language in which they were originally prepared.
   3. Instructors highlight local cultural events (such as lectures, films, music, theater, festivals) that represent aspects of the target culture.
   4. Students are encouraged to participate in language partnerships (face-to-face and virtual) in order to develop the three learning outcomes: language proficiency, metalinguistic awareness, and cross-cultural awareness.
B. Outside of the classroom, the value of learning one or more foreign languages is communicated in the following ways:

1. Each language program’s brochure and website stress the importance of learning languages as part of a well-rounded education. Both also highlight the usefulness of the target language as a language of international communication and as an important language in the arts, sciences and politics.

2. At the annual UWM Open House, prospective students are given information on the values of studying a foreign language. Proposed action: Language coordinators will meet with Academic Advisors in the colleges and schools to convey the importance of language learning in the global 21st century and to find out more about the different needs of students in individual programs.