

CLAC:

Cultures and Languages Across
the Curriculum

IEPS Forum

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Presenter

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(with thanks to Dr. Diana K. Davies, *Director of International Programs*, University of Iowa)

An old concept, in a new context...

- “Universities don’t think globally – it’s not ingrained in their philosophy and curriculum to create the global worker.” – *Respondent to RAND Corporation Survey*
- “We had terrific situational awareness; what we lacked was cultural awareness.” – *General David Petreus*
- “CED recommends that international content be taught across the curriculum and at all levels of learning...” – *Committee for Economic Development report, 2006*

Continuing paucity of language study and use in U.S. higher education

- Little diversity in languages offered
 - Decline of “The Big Two” (French and German)
 - Hegemony of “The Big One” (Spanish)
 - Rise of “LCTLs” (Less Commonly Taught Languages)
 - esp. heritage languages, but still very small numbers
- Low enrollments (esp. in LOTS: languages other than Spanish)
 - Only one in 12 take language courses; and of these only one in 4 – about 2 percent of all college students – go beyond 4 semesters
 - Seat-time requirements have rebounded a bit recently, but proficiency and continued use requirements are still lacking
 - Limited variety of specialized disciplinary expertise, even at graduate level
- Upshot: American college students typically possess less skill in a language other than English upon graduation than upon admission.
 - Because most college-bound high-school students take FL

For a new generation of learners... the “Metropolitan Migrants” ... who ...

- Will have multiple careers in multiple places.
- Will interact with multiple cultures, at home or abroad.
- Come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Need adaptable cross-cultural navigation strategies.
- Want self-directed learning strategies that are flexible, individualized, and life-long.

After Richard Lambert, 1989

- Recommendations for the improvement of language teaching in the US
- 1. **Diversify** language **uses** [cf. “communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities”]
- 2. **Prolong** study: Begin earlier, continue through college
- 3. **Offer options** in timing [summer, intersession] and mode [study groups, brief immersion, video gaming]
- 4. **Support maintenance** beyond formal education
- 5. **Target** most promising students [e.g. heritage learners, area studies majors, ...]
- 6. **Develop emergency capability**
 - **CLAC responds directly to the first three of these recommendations – diversify and prolong study and use, and offer options – and supports the others.**

CLAC gives students opportunities to use languages ...

- Outside the traditional FL classroom.
- Before, during, and after the study abroad experience.
- Within and across disciplines.
- As a part of life-long learning.

CLAC : General Principles

- Focus on communication, not grammar.
 - Emphasize meaningful use, not language instruction.
 - Gauge language advances via proficiency, not seat time.
- Use language as a tool for intellectual integration.
 - Synthesize knowledge produced in multiple languages and cultures.
 - Develop high-level critical thinking skills.
- Challenge faculty to empower students to employ their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge.
 - Provide heritage learners with the tools they need to bridge the gap between work/school and home.
 - Provide non-heritage learners with the tools they need to bridge the gaps between work/school, home, and the FL classroom and/or study abroad experience.

FLAC/LAC – (Foreign) Languages Across the Curriculum

- Language-enhanced courses
 - Professor utilizes own expertise to incorporate FL texts
 - “Literature in translation” taught by FL faculty has separate component for students who can read *la version originale*
- Content-based (at home or through study abroad)
 - “Latin American History” taught in Spanish (the obvious connection)
 - “Philosophy of Abortion” using mass publications in both English and Spanish as examples of culturally distinct positions to be subjected to philosophical analysis (the expanding connection)
 - “Intro to Accounting” taught in Spanish (the not-so-obvious connection, revealing cross-cultural differences in practice)
- Team-taught or paired courses
 - 1 Business professor + 1 FL professor teach together
 - 1 Lat. Amer. Hist. course + 1 content-based Spanish course 9

LxC (and related variants)

Native speakers/content experts (“Language Resource Specialists”) lead study groups or course modules linked to larger courses taught in English.

- Students in these groups are encouraged to utilize authentic non-English texts and resources, even if the course instructor doesn’t understand that language.
- Participation may count toward course requirements and contribute to the grade in the larger course, or it may count as separate credit-bearing enrollment.
- Skill levels and amount of use of the language (in reading, listening, speaking, and writing) may vary between and even within groups.

Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum

- Emphasizes cultural content even in supposedly “universal” disciplines (i.e., disciplines allegedly free of cultural content, such as sciences & engineering).
 - Helps students identify cultural content within all disciplines and develop essential cross-cultural interpretive skills.
- Instills appreciation of differing cultural perspectives, interdependencies among all nations and regions, and issues of long-term sustainability of proposed solutions.
 - Fosters commitment to responsible global citizenship.
- Introduces flexible cross-cultural navigation strategies
 - “First, seek to understand; then, seek to be understood” (Stephen Covey).

CLAC Consortium Conferences

- Fall 2005: University of Iowa
- Fall 2006: Portland State University
- Fall 2008: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
–15-17 October

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CLAC Obstacles

- Ignorance and misperceptions of CLAC goals and methodologies
 - Lack of faculty preparation for the demands of CLAC
 - Lost tradition of use of multilingual sources in research and scholarship
 - But lingering belief that the only legitimate such sources must be scholarly, cutting-edge works by academics abroad
 - Resistance to “giving up course content for the sake of language instruction or development of translation skills”
- Competition, instead of coöperation, between CLAC and other academic initiatives
 - “Yet another un-funded mandate!”
 - “What are we supposed to stop doing in order to do CLAC?”
- Inadequate student preparation – lack of necessary background cultural knowledge and linguistic proficiency

And more challenges...

- Faculty unwillingness to relinquish control and empower students
- Departmental and disciplinary boundaries
- Lack of CLAC resources

What challenges are YOU facing?

