

Foreign Language as a Graduation Requirement for Stetson University

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## **Foreign Language as a Graduation Requirement for Stetson University**

Foreign language is not a requirement for all of the students graduating from Stetson University. It all depends on which college or school the student has registered under for their major. Those in the College of Arts and Science, as well as Discovery majors, who are undeclared, are not required to take foreign language. These students need to fill five out of six units in the general education requirements. Foreign language is counted as one of these six and with that students can avoid taking a foreign language by completing all of the other general education units. On the other hand, the School of Business mandates that its students complete a modern language class in the 102 level. Students can either take two semesters of a foreign language to meet that requirement or pass an exemption test to show competency. Falling in the middle between the College of Arts and Science and the School of Business is the School of Music. The requirements for the students in the School of Music depend on what their major is. Each major in the School of Music has a different goal—some are not required to take foreign language, some have to take one course, other's two. In the end, though, the way foreign language is set up for requirements is both confusing and lacking. Stetson should make foreign language a requirement for all graduating students no matter what major they are. The act of learning a foreign language and the end reward of becoming bilingual are filled with a plethora of benefits ranging from an increase in cognitive skills to becoming more desirable to hiring companies. If Stetson makes foreign language a requirement then the university is preparing their students for more fruitful lives as they graduate from the college.

The academic benefits of learning another language are plentiful and would certainly help any Stetson student whatever their major. Skills that are used when learning another language, such as “1) learning vocabulary in context, 2) developing a sensitivity for nuance in the meaning

of words, 3) using contextual cues to guess at the meaning of unknown words in a passage, and 4) reading a text with special care...” (Thomas C. Cooper 386), are the skills that students can bring to their reading and writing intensive classes. When undergoing the path of becoming bilingual students use studying and learning techniques they might not have used otherwise. If Stetson changes its foreign language policies so that all students are required to learn a foreign language then all of its students would gain the academic benefits. No matter where a student may be in their process of learning another language—a new comer just starting out with the alphabet and simple phrases or a student progressing through multiple years of tenses and conjugation—the skills used during this period are highly desirable. Even if the beginner students does not show as much improvement right away, learning another language will help their studies later in their education. A study in Turku, Finland showed that “Pupils who study in bilingual classes were especially advanced in reading comprehension skills; thus they were well prepared for successful studies later on” (Tuula Merisuo-Storm). While Stetson students would not be studying in bilingual classes they would still gain the same or similar benefits from learning a foreign language.

Stetson prides itself on having well-rounded students who “dare to be significant.” How else can the community of Stetson improve on this reputation? They can do this by having foreign language classes become a mandatory requirement for graduating students. Yale University, a college known for its status, has a foreign language requirement. Their students must finish the language requirement by the end of their junior year, leaving no time for slacking off. Yale, however, is not the only school who takes foreign languages seriously. Harvard College also requires their students to take a foreign language. Some schools allow students to exempt out of foreign language classes by taking a placement test (Stetson included). Harvard

takes it one step further only allowing students to exempt out only if they "...fulfill the requirement before entering Harvard by scoring 700 on a College Board language assessment test, a 5 on an Advanced Placement (AP) language test, or a 7 on an appropriate International Baccalaureate Higher Level exam" (Degree Requirements). These grades are incredibly hard to achieve- with a 5 being the highest score once can receive on the Advanced Placement test. If Stetson wants to reach the same level of stature as Yale or Harvard, they should take a page out of the two Ivy League school's book. Make foreign language a requirement and if there should be a placement test then that placement test should be rigorous enough that students are correctly filtered into the right class. Having students slip into a higher class with a faulty placement test, or having unprepared students in higher courses of that language, would do no good to either Stetson or the student. Gaining well-known language courses would raise Stetson's reputation to a higher degree. This would be beneficial to the school as more choice students would apply to Stetson. These students would be scholastically vigorous and in the end run Stetson's reputation would further increase.

Once out of Stetson these students who prevail in learning another language will become more marketable to future employers. Suddenly, these students will be a leg above the competition by having control over a foreign language, boosting them above others who will apply for the same job. Studies by multiple universities show how the benefits of becoming bilingual when concerning employment: "According to a study carried out by the University of Florida, the University of Miami and the Florida Department of Education, Hispanics who are fluent in Spanish and English earn almost \$7,000 more than their English-only counterparts" (Bakersfield College). It is no surprise that speakers of multiple languages are more successful than those who have only mastered one language. More and more foreign countries are entering

the business and economic world. One of the United States' biggest competitors in the business world is China. If a student is given the opportunity to learn a branch of Chinese then they could enter this new economic footrace with a step above those who lack that communicative skill. Susanna Kim, an ABC News journalist, reported that "Mandarin Chinese is the most useful language for business after English, spoken by 845 million people in the world's second-largest economy, China" (Kim). Many of the citizens living in other countries are not hesitating to learn English as a second language. Eventually, as bilingualism becomes more common the benefits that learning a foreign language will no longer become an advantage but a necessity. This should be a cue for America to start treating learning another language more seriously. Some believe that they should not learn another language for there is no need to as other countries are learning English. Yet this is a false cognitive. Since other countries are setting the bar at two languages they can reach higher places than countries who only settle on one language. The need to communicate with others is vital and the process of having dual languages become normality in America can start with Stetson.

Communication is a huge factor in any relationship. The risks are higher, though, when dealing with business communications. As jobs shift overseas and business dealings stretch further around the globe than they have ever been due to the improvement of technology and the competition for resources, the young graduates entering the working world will need to be equipped to face this new world. When the connection between two businesses is strengthened because the employees know how to communicate, in either language, then that growth is expands outwards.

Learning another language is not just about the improved test scores, the academic prestige, or the financial gains. Understanding another country through their language brings

about a cultural aspect to those who wish to learn. The enrichment that a person gains by knowing a different language can help them understand native classics such as the Spanish poet, Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar's classic poem "Cantar del mio Cid" or the Japanese play, *Momijigari*, which ended up turning into one of Japan's earliest films and is designated as important cultural property in Japan. While a person who cannot understand these languages is still able to read or watch such works of art though subtitles or translations, it still lacks the cultural heart which provides the art with its identity. There are some phrases in different languages that simply cannot be translated into English. A personal gain is given to the student who studies another language. It will also help them explore different countries without the aid of a translator. Speaking to natives in their common tongue instead of English, for the most part, will make relationships easier to form when traveling. The student who shows an attempt in learning another country's customs and culture gains respect in foreign places. It is a courtesy that takes effort and time but truly pays off in the end run.

Learning a foreign language in college is important then, but how long should Stetson require students to take foreign language? Each student learns at a different rate and the end goal should be a comfortable mastery rather than a passing grade. To that end Stetson should look at the programs developed by both Yale and Harvard. Having a fixed term when the language class is required to be taken (like Yale does) and combining that with, at the very least, a minimum of a 201 level would help determine guidelines. Since students would be required to take foreign language classes then there would be money spent by both student and school to fund such a project. The students will have to pay for taking these courses and the school would perhaps have to endow the modern language department with more teachers and tutoring facilities to

support the influx of new pupils. In the end, though, it is worth it. The students gain so much more from learning another language and Stetson would gain a higher degree of notability.

Our world is evolving, more and more countries are stressing the importance of learning another language. There may even become a time where being bilingual is the norm for most people. Until then Stetson and the students who go to Stetson should start preparing and reaping the benefits of learning another language other than English. The policy concerning foreign language in Stetson needs to be altered to fit the demands of an evolving world. Students should be required to learn a foreign language no matter what major they are in. It does not matter if they are a music major, education major, or even a physics major, language is important and even more so the culture that language brings with it.

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