Summary of Findings:

Findings are reported below for the five languages individually (Spanish, Japanese, German, French, Russian) comprising 9 sections of 101 and 102. In general, responses after 101 tended to be more general and include more stereotypes about the languages and cultures. Answers after 102 tended to be both more specific and more positive. Overall students among the languages all reported a desire to travel to foreign countries (or in the case of Spanish to use their language skills here in the US), to learn more about both foreign cultures and their own, and to boost their ability to communicate.

Along these lines students reported that “I can see things from a different point of view” (Russian) and “Learning a new language and experiencing a new culture helped me to appreciate the complexities of my own language and culture” (Japanese). Evidence of this can be found in statements like “I don’t consider English nearly as expressive as I used to” (Russian). A student of Spanish summed up what many people felt in writing that he/she sought “a greater understanding of what language is, and how it is formed and used. I feel understanding the root of communication can only come in handy when trying to understand other things.” (Spanish)

Especially in the second survey given after 102 language classes, students were critically reflecting on how learning a foreign language gave them a new vantage point to consider their own culture/language and also offered them greater entry into the rest of the world.
Students state that their reasons for learning Spanish mostly involved some mix of fluency or greater fluency in Spanish, a desire to communicate with people in Spanish speaking countries, and using it for work-related purposes. Students reported a desire to travel to Hispanic countries and speak with people there as well as using Spanish in the US in Spanish speaking communities. Multiple students mentioned using Spanish for their jobs, such as in the medical/nursing community, or in general.

Students perceive Spanish to be widely used in both the world and within the US and very helpful for traveling abroad. Most students had a positive initial feeling about the language and several responded that it sounds ‘friendly’ and that their teachers were friendly. A few students wrote that they had little initial feeling about the language or were “neutral” towards it, but of these students a few wrote that after a semester studying the language their views had shifted to be positive toward the language. Some students wrote that they grew up in Spanish-speaking communities or families, so they were already highly familiar with the language.

When students think about Spanish-speaking cultures almost a third wrote that family and hard work are strongly valued. One student wrote that growing up with avocado growing in Southern California, they associated tremendously hard labor in the groves and the desire to work for ones family as a strong Spanish related value. Many wrote that they think not about a foreign country but about the US and one responded that “Well, I mostly want Spanish for the lower 48. I don’t think about Mexico or Spain, I just want to be able to communicate in Seattle.” In less specific terms, this was a common response.

When students relate Spanish-speaking cultures to their own culture a clear majority wrote that US and Spanish-speaking culture overlap. One student wrote that “English is America’s language...and now so is Spanish. Time to adapt.” Many wrote that learning Spanish gave them some new viewpoint from which to consider their own language, but even more wrote that learning Spanish gave them better access to certain parts of US culture (especially in the south, the lower 48, California, Seattle, etc.).

When asked about how the study of Spanish has confirmed or changed the students’s original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken most respondents wrote that it didn’t change their ideas as much as deepen them somewhat. Students wrote about how they greatly increased their vocabulary and linguistic understanding (for example better distinguishing between por and para), learned more about Hispanic customs, and also learned about the great diversity among Spanish-speaking cultures and even different dialects and regional differences between西班牙s. Many wrote about how open Spanish speaking cultures are, how they enjoy such a wide range of celebrations and enjoy gusto for life. One student wrote that, “The study of this language has given
me way more than just knowledge of words. It has given me an understanding of culture, with everything from driving technicalities to dating etiquette, latin music, to household setups."

When asked how the study of Spanish has confirmed or changed their ideas about their own culture, they observed a new found respect for how difficult it would be to learn English as a foreign language. Spanish was seen as being more straightforward and easier compared to the many arcane rules, exceptions, and non-phonetic spellings of English. Many reported that it study of Spanish didn’t change their perceptions of English that much. Some reported that they were impressed by how open and friendly Spanish-speaking cultures were, especially in comparison with the US.

Japanese 101 - Fall 2009 (2 sections)

Students state that their reasons for learning Japanese included a desire to be fluent in the language, a desire to learn about the culture, be able to travel there and converse with native speakers. Multiple students stated that they were studying Japanese because it was the major. Individual respondents stated that they simply wanted to learn another language in addition to English, wanted to “broaden their cultural horizon”, wanted to be able to read a book in Japanese, or wanted to learn more kanji.

Students perceive Japanese to be both fun and challenging. A clear majority of the respondents stated that Japanese was exciting and interesting and they were very eager to study it but that they also thought it would be a hard language to study for a variety of reasons. These included the perceived fast speed of talking by native speakers, different pronunciation, the difficulty of mastering pitch of spoken words, and a different orthography. Some speakers thought aspects of Japanese, such as speaking, were actually not that hard. Two students wrote that they liked that Japanese was so different from Chinese. One student wrote that they liked that Japanese was very different from Chinese. One respondent wrote that although the language seemed fast and abrupt at first, later it sounded pretty, especially when set to music (in songs).

When students think about Japanese culture answers tend to cluster around aspects related to either traditional Japanese values or arts and contemporary cultural production (or a mix of the two). Traditional values and arts were the best represented among answers with almost half of the answers referencing values of discipline, respect and the like as important in Japan. Students also mentioned eastern religion, Buddhism, zen, stone gardens, the samurai, and the like. Contemporary references were made to anime (animated narratives), manga (printed graphic novels), innovation, technological prowess, a strong economy, large cities (Tokyo), and the like. Almost a quarter of the answers mentioned good food. One students mentioned being a heritage learner and wanting to more strongly connect to Japanese family/ancestors.

When students relate Japan to their own culture they often stressed its difference, noting that the two were so different that it was hard to relate them together. One
student noted that it helped them understand their own culture better. Another student wrote that “I see our own culture as being less rich and interesting.” Some students wrote that parts of Japanese culture are now important in the US as Japanese culture goes global, so it helped them understand the roots of those cultural imports better.

**Japanese 102 - Spring 2010 (2 sections)**

When asked about how the study of Japanese has confirmed or changed the students’s original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken most students wrote around a theme of how knowing the language better helped them understand the culture better. One student wrote that, “There were so many assumptions and biases I had that I hadn’t realized I was keeping. This language class has helped me clear them up and expand my understanding of different culture.” One or two students wrote that they had traveled to Japan before so the class didn’t really change their perceptions so much.

When asked how the study of Japanese has confirmed or changed their ideas about their own culture, many observed how easy English is in comparison with Japanese. Specific observations included that Japanese worked much harder than US citizens, that ideas of individualism versus group centeredness vary between the two countries, that writing is so hard in Japan compared to the English with its purely phonetic language, and how greatly different are “humor, literature, and culture.”

**French 101 - Fall 2009 (2 sections)**

Students state that their reasons for learning French are: a minor in French, self enrichment, a new language and the interest to know more about French culture; fluency in the target language, travel abroad, a greater perception of other cultures and languages, confidence in writing, speaking etc.; improving conversational skills, speaking with in-laws; a deeper appreciation of French culture, science, and art; interest in an exchange program with Montreal; listening to news reports, marketability, a more diverse understanding of the world, basic communication, another language to speak in Europe.

Students perceive the French as classy and they like the language, but the culture is another story; the French language is lyrical, similar to Spanish, intriguing, and it reminds students of Spanish; probably hard to learn, but they have positive feelings about it because family members speak the language; French is very fast, beautiful, romantic, spoken throughout Europe and Africa, broadens intercultural communications, complicated but interesting; hard to pronounce and understand, sounds great, not suitable for self-study, but also very easy to learn after speaking Spanish; the class is moving at a really good pace; it is a positive, constructive class with a good teacher; students love French, it is complex, elegant, and French culture and language are wonderful.
When students think of French culture, they associate it with being not very tourist-friendly; but then there is elegance, openness, cheese, baguettes, and overcast skies; they associate it with dark-haired women, mustachioed men; it is a slightly mysterious and overrated, formal culture with liberal views on life; good food and romance, composers such as Poulenc, Milhaud, Boulanger, French see themselves as counterbalance to US in the world; French are often seen as very rude, but they are also warm people with diverse cultures in which French is spoken; Paris, fine food, Eiffel Tower, sophistication, intimate cafes, old language; history and art, fashion, French revolution, laid-back culture!

When students relate the study of French to their own culture, they find many similarities between the two languages. They get confused with the formal and informal ways of saying; as a singer and performer a student needs the language skills; some popular French phrases are used in English and there are cognates; neither culture is better, we share differences and similarities; American culture is fast-paced, France has deeper roots than our culture, and the food is far better than in US.

French 102 - Spring 2010 (1 section)

When asked how the study of French has confirmed or changed the students' original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken, they gave the following answers: the first semester pretty much confirmed what students already knew about French culture; there are many beautiful buildings, and the French feel sometimes superior about their way of doing things, but so do we! Students learned new things, for example, Martinique is French; they broadened their knowledge about where French is spoken; they gained a deeper understanding of French culture and how people are different from us; they were given more insight, learned about different customs, landmarks; they emphasized they did not know much at the beginning, but now they are able to break down preconceived notions and correct false information. They learned that to obtain the knowledge to be able to communicate in French is not out of their reach; they learned about the language itself, learned more about the cuisine; French is much more difficult than expected, but they enjoy the challenge.

When asked how the study of French has confirmed or changed their ideas about their own culture, they observed: there is nothing new; American English speakers are somewhat ethnocentric; foreign languages and cultures are more interesting; the languages are much alike; we developed our own culture by borrowing from others; it has changed everything I thought about America, made me see things differently.

German 101 - Fall 2009

Students state that their reasons for learning German are: to become proficient speakers of German, learn more about the history and culture of Germany,
marketability, family ties to Germany, people skills, mental flexibility, prior positive experiences in Germany. They want to travel, live, study, or work abroad.

Students perceive that German language as difficult and challenging, but that it is worth the effort to learn. The German language is more sophisticated than English, and it has deeper meaning. It is harsh, awesome, loud, obnoxious, has long words, but also has a strict set of rules that should make it easier to learn.

When students think of German culture, they associate it with music, good mathematicians, WW II, bread, beer, seriousness, beautiful buildings and towns, cleanliness, Rammstein, Oktoberfest, Dürer, engineering, chemical industry, intelligence, precision, rocket scientist, coo coo clocks. German people are hardworking, proud of their culture and food, they are fun, straight forward, blunt, militaristic, honest, and friendly.

When students relate the study of German to their own culture, they find many similarities between the two languages. However, German makes more sense than English from a grammatical point of view. Both countries are large economies. German seems more rigid. US food is not as good as German food. Americans are not as proud of their language as Germans are. Germans are very emotional and Americans are narrow-minded. Germany is so much more unique and beautiful than anything the student has seen in Hawaii. Most stress, that both cultures have a lot in common. Americans can learn form Germans how to protect the environment, be more efficient, and how to play.

German 102 - Spring 2010

When asked how the study of German has confirmed or changed the students’ original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken, they gave the following answers: they feel enlightened about Germany, and they think that Hollywood’s portrayal of Germany is way off. The German language is not too difficult to learn, and the study of the language has made them like German even more. German has proved to be both elegant and difficult, and they are amazed how precise the language is. It is a great language to speak, and Germany is a polite culture. One student notes that now he/she no longer believes what he/she had heard: that Germans walk around town naked for recreation.

When asked how the study of German has conformed or changed their ideas about their own culture, they observed: how little history the US and Alaska have compared to Europe. How much of the English language derived from German. Americans are ignorant. There are differences, but other say that both cultures melt into each other. Students have become more skeptical of their own culture. It changes how you see your own culture. US needs to learn from other cultures and must become more open-minded.
Students state that their reasons for learning Russian include the desire to visit Russia, desire to gain fluency, and a desire by several respondents to use Russian in their future career (one mentioned law enforcement). Multiple answers mentioned a desire to learn a different alphabet. One mentioned the desire to converse with family members in Russian and also the ability to broaden their cultural outlook generally by speaking a third language (after English and Yupik).

Almost half of the students surveyed responded along the lines that they thought Russian was hard but fascinating. In particular many respondents mentioned the different alphabet; how cyrillic was challenging at first but interesting as well. Many mentioned that they loved the way Russian sounded, with some saying that it was very different than English and one saying that it was surprisingly close to English.

When students think about Russian culture the top three answers were associated around Soviet Russia (and the Cold War), with Russia as a traditional and proper culture, and with first hand experiences with Russia relating to Alaska, either historically when Russia owned Alaska or even more commonly with Russian communities today in Delta Junction and towards Wasilla. Soviet references included the usual suspects of Communism, a rival of the US, James Bond, corruptions, militarism and so forth. Multiple students also mentioned that they thought Russians were very proper, traditional, boasting a long history, and so on. Finally 2-3 students mentioned contact with living culture in Alaska and how Russians were very practical people in their opinion.

When students relate Russian to their own culture many responded that the two cultures were different and they were not sure how to compare them. Several respondents stated that they weren’t really sure how to answer the question. One mentioned that he/she was confused sometimes by false friends, words with the same sound in Russian and Yupik. One students mentioned that they were interested in how Russia was also a cold culture of the far north and how they handled these challenges compared to Alaskans.

When asked about how the study of Russian has confirmed or changed the students’s original ideas about the culture in which it is spoken many students expressed satisfaction that they had learned a great deal about the culture and its customs. One wrote that Russians are typically seen as stoic and somber but that studying Russian showed him that they were also quite beautiful and colorful. Some mentioned how it helped them go beyond stereotypes of vodka to realize that “Russian culture is both rich and ancient.” Humor was also in evidence as one stated that they now realize that “not all Russian men are capable of wrestling bears to death. Just most of them.” One stated
that he no longer even remembered how he thought of Russia(n) before taking the
class, but now had a much deeper appreciation for the culture. The only mentions of
Soviet Russia were those describing how their understanding of Russia now went
deeper than just Cold War references. There was reference to an understanding of how
important the weight of history was in determining culture.

When asked how the study of Russian has confirmed or changed their ideas about their
own culture, many observed that they learned more about English grammar studying
Russian than when they studied English. Several responded that they better realized
how little a role history played in US cultural life when compared to the Russian
experience. Two evinced a new found appreciation for how proper and polite Russian
culture is.