

FOREIGN LANGUAGES CORE ASSESSMENT for 2011-2012

The Foreign Languages Department faculty (Alla Grikurova, Josef Glowka, and Trina R. Mamoon) reviewed the responses of 355 students who returned the FL Core survey. The following is a summary of their findings. Overall, the surveys demonstrate that students who take the FL101/102 courses have a positive opinion about the target culture. Most of the respondents say that they learned a great deal of grammar and learned about the culture and history of the cultures they are studying as well.

FALL 2011:

FRENCH 101 (2 sections; 41 respondents)

1. Initial impressions

Beautiful sounds but difficult to pronounce; concerns about “all these unnecessary letters”. Sounds like music. There are positive feelings simply because it’s spoken all over the world. Bizarre but intriguing. Attractive; smooth. Gorgeous flowing sounds; sensual; little snooty; very academic language; romantic.

2. Perceptions/opinions of the culture

Associations with LES MISERABLES; love, art and beauty; with being treated poorly if you don’t speak it (which was the experience of that particular student); food. There was a comment that the French culture is overly stereotyped; berets, big noses/moustaches, cheese, bread etc. Lazy; smoking; good wines; elitist mentality with tones of vainness; high fashion; fantastic cuisine; rebellion and freedom; a blend of rich history with modern, forward thinking.

3. In relation to your own language and culture

English seems boring, and not romantic. French is very different. Food and wine here are influenced by the French culture. French seems more proper than English. French seems like more established culture; less of a mix. People in Europe have misconceptions about the U.S., and there are similarly false ideas about France in the U.S.

“Americans are almost like the French, just without the accent”.

4. Hoping to gain

Learning the language; gaining a different aspect of life and different way of looking at problems. Gaining some perspective on where French philosophers are coming from (a comment from a Philosophy major). Gaining a broader view of life; translate French poetry into English; participate in foreign exchange; get a better understanding of your own language; expand your view of the world.

GERMAN 101 (2 sections; 45 respondents)

1. Initial impressions

A very interesting language; slightly coarse but gentle in some ways; seemed a little intimidating at first; beautiful but sounds a little difficult; many words are similar to English; sounds enjoyable; looks a little easier than Japanese; fun and exciting; somewhat hard to pronounce.

“Sounds cool but makes my head hurt”

“Despite popular opinion, I don’t believe every sentence sounds like a death threat”

“Terrifying but fun. Easily soft and fluidic, or harsh and abrupt”

“... German appears to be a “dirty” sounding language, but somewhat similar to English”

“It’s pretty intimidating” “Different” “Sounds interesting but may be difficult” “Abrupt yet romantic; can sound brutal and soft” “Fun” “More challenging than Spanish” “Tough”

“Funny sounding language”

2. Perceptions/opinions of the culture

Associated with long history; fairy tales; cobblestone streets; good education; talent for engineering and technical fields; orderly people; very fun and slightly formal; very industrious, empirical culture; intelligent people ready for the future; very proud people with good work ethic; bright and brilliant culture; lederhosen; beer; BMW, AUDI; “culture overshadowed by transgressions that are commonly associated with the entirety of its people”; practical hard working people who always sound a little angry; Hitler; Third Reich; very different; sharing roots and similarities with English; “often comes off intimidating due to German history with the U.S. and movies”; “Germans are mostly happy people who like to drink and have fun”; sausage; Oktoberfest; tough guys; intense coaches; hardcore athletes; drinking parties; fun loving people; state-of-the-art technology and production; solid science and a well developed educational system; strong sense of German identity; wealth of music history and scientific achievement; “good food, good people, good beer”; family

3. In relation to your own language and culture

“The US government structure was in part based upon German political principles

“Germans are more efficient”

“Our English culture puts a little too much emphasis on fun and not enough on work ethic”

Many similarities; closely related languages

4. Hoping to gain

The ability to speak/correspond with family members in German; better understanding of one's heritage; basis for international career; understanding news; a new way of thinking; better

JAPANESE 101 (2 sections; 42 respondents)

1. Initial impressions

Difficult; tons to memorize; beautiful; mystifying; precise; very structured; challenging; fun; straightforward; elegant; cool; upbeat; cumbersome; confusing; influenced by Chinese; hard and very math-like; very different; fascinating; complicated; fast flowing

2. Perceptions/opinions of the culture

Traditional but rapidly changing culture, with a strong sense of honor, order, and respect. Associated with humility and formality; feudal culture; samurai; food. Business-oriented and polite people; advanced technologies. Interesting night life activities. Organized people who are prepared for everything. Martial arts; anime; karate. Japanese people are humble and kind, disciplined and ambitious, and friendly. They are quiet and respectful.

3. In relation to your own language and culture

There is a sense of how unique the Japanese culture is, and that English culture holds honor and tradition at a much lower standard. Some feel there is a lack of the respect in the U.S., and fewer traditions. There are many comments on Japan being a different world from the U.S. One student said that the two cultures are similar, in their ability to adapt, and to adopt new words into the language. Another person wrote that, after visiting Japan, (s)he tries to be more respectful of others and not so loud.

4. Hoping to gain

Students hope to learn the language and connect with the culture; to broaden their horizons; to watch and read anime; to gain a better understanding of Japan and themselves (1 comment); to read books and watch movies without subtitles. Many want to gain enough proficiency and travel to Japan.

RUSSIAN 101 (1 section, 18 respondents)

Students state that their reasons for learning Russian included a desire to be proficient in the language and to converse with native speakers. Students wish to learn about the culture, and they want to travel there. Individual respondents stated that they simply

wanted to learn another language in addition to English, or they wanted to gain a better understanding of English by studying a foreign language. Students also mentioned they hoped to find a better job, or a job in which they could use Russian. One wished to be able to read research publications in Russian. Another student expressed the intention to teach English in Russia.

Students' initial impressions of Russian culture was overwhelmingly positive. Several responded that it sounds 'beautiful' and that this language overall is more interesting than other languages. Several pointed out that they had a "warm", "energetic", and "skilled" professor. A few students noted that it was initially hard to learn, challenging and intimidating, but in the end the majority of students stressed the fun they had in Russian class.

When students think about Russian culture answers tend to focus on history (cold war), the arts, literature and science. One student remembered the winter Olympics, others stressed the large geographical and cultural diversity of the country. A number of students cited the relatively strong presence of Russian Americans in Alaska as a motivation to study this language.

When students relate Russia to their own culture they often stressed its difference, noting that the two are different, but similarities are also seen. One student noted that he/she loves the food and had a parent who speaks the language, Another student wrote that one should learn each other's language to better understanding between the two countries and to avoid stereotyping. Generally, question number 3 seems to have confused a large number of students, as they either did not answer it or gave very vague and short answers.

SPANISH 101 - Fall 2011 (4 sections, 94 respondents)

The majority of students state that their main reasons for learning Spanish mostly involved some mix of basic fluency or greater fluency in Spanish, a desire to communicate with their friends and/or other people in Spanish speaking countries. A significant number of students pointed out that it would improve their chances finding better jobs. One student mentioned it would help him/her communicating better with customers at work. Others reported a desire to travel to Spanish-speaking countries as well as using the language in Spanish speaking communities in the US. Multiple students cited rather disappointing high school experiences and wished to be more successful in college-level classes.

Most students perceive the Spanish/ Hispanic culture as vibrant and colorful. Spanish-speaking people are described as outgoing, passionate, religious, and family-oriented. Many emphasize that Spanish/Hispanic people work hard, love their holidays and traditions. Food, music, and dance are also major attractions. It is interesting to note that many students seem to associate Spanish-speaking people primarily or exclusively with Mexico, or Mexican-Americans. They usually cite the common border or experiences while traveling in Mexico (beautiful beaches, long history, but also poverty).

When students relate Spanish-speaking cultures to their own culture a majority emphasized that Spanish seems to have become part of US culture. Many stressed they gained a different perspective and a better understanding of their own culture. However, some think that English seems to be harsh, boring, and dull, when compared to the musicality and flow of the Spanish language. Generally, students seemed to have problems answering question # 3. Many did not come up with a response or wrote vague answers, such as “both cultures are somehow different, but also similar in many ways.”

SPRING 2012: FL CORE ASSESSMENT for 2011-2012

FRENCH 102 (2 sections; 9 respondents)

1. Describe how the study of this language has confirmed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

Respondents in 101 had said that French is a beautiful language but difficult to pronounce. For 102 one student wrote: “I didn’t have original ideas. I’m very open minded to other cultures.” While another said: “Absolutely. I love French.”

2. Describe how the study of this language has changed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

The few who responded to this question said that their ideas hadn’t changed. One student wrote: “I thought it was a little froo froo, but it was ignorant of me.”

3. How has the study of this language confirmed your ideas about your own language and culture?

One student said that American and French cultures are very different. Another said that English is a confusing language.

4. How has the study of this language changed your ideas about your own language and culture?

There were very few responses to this question. One student wrote that his/her ideas hadn’t changed, while another wrote: “I don’t want to live in the US anymore.”

GERMAN 102 (1 section; 14 respondents)

1. Describe how the study of this language has confirmed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

Many students described German to be precise and organized. One student wrote: “The language is efficient, much like the German culture.” One student reported that his/her ideas were confirmed.

2. Describe how the study of this language has changed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

While a few of the respondents reported that their ideas hadn’t changed, a few reported that they learned more about the German culture and history this semester.

3. How has the study of this language confirmed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Almost half of the respondents left this question unanswered. One student said: “I wish America had the German attitude to work and finance.” Another said that English is a difficult language.

4. How has the study of this language changed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Many students didn’t answer this question. Almost all who did answer this question said that their ideas hadn’t changed. One wrote: “I am now a kartoffel!”

JAPANESE 102 (2 sections; 24 respondents)

1. Describe how the study of this language has confirmed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken?

Students have a positive view of Japanese culture. Some called the language efficient and beautifully structured. One student said the movies he/she watched confirmed their ideas about Japan.

2. Describe how the study of this language has changed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

One student reported that Japanese is even more complex than he/she imagined it to be. Another student said his/her ideas didn’t changed, but they evolved. Several said that their original ideas didn’t change.

3. How has the study of this language confirmed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Several respondents stated that their ideas hadn't changed. One student stated that American culture is more fast-paced than the Japanese culture. Another stated that English is hard.

4. How has the study of this language changed your ideas about your own language and culture?

One student stated that he/she knew very little about his/her own culture. One student said that English is a hard language. Another student stated that he/she now has more appreciation for both English and Japanese.

RUSSIAN 102 (1 section; 17 respondents)

1. Describe how the study of this language has confirmed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

A few students stated that they didn't know much about Russia or the Russian culture before they took this class. One student described Russian as structured, while another called it awesome. A few respondents said that Russians value education and music.

2. Describe how the study of this language has changed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

While several students stated that their ideas hadn't changed, some said that they learned more about Russian culture and history in this class.

3. How has the study of this language confirmed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Several students said that English is a difficult language, while one student said that English is very easy.

4. How has the study of this language changed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Half of the respondents reported that their ideas hadn't changed. A few said that they learned a lot about English grammar in this class.

SPANISH 102 (3 sections; 51 respondents)

1. Describe how the study of this language has confirmed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

Most students in SPAN 101 had described the Spanish/Hispanic culture as vibrant and colorful, and Spanish-speakers as outgoing, passionate, and religious. Most students of 102 on the other hand reported not having remembered their “original” ideas about this culture. Some reported that they now understand the differences between the “Spanish culture and ours.” A few respondents said that they are now aware that there are differences among the cultures of different Spanish-speaking countries.

2. Describe how the study of this language has changed your original ideas about the cultures in which it is spoken.

The majority of the students reported that their original ideas about the Spanish culture hadn’t changed. A few stated that their ideas hadn’t changed but that had expanded. While some others stated that they are now more interested in these cultures.

3. How has the study of this language confirmed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Most respondents left this question unanswered. One student wrote: “I am very lucky to have learned English from birth.” A few remarked that English is harder than Spanish.

4. How has the study of this language changed your ideas about your own language and culture?

Only about a half of the respondents answered this question. Many of those who answered this question stated that their ideas about their own language and culture hadn’t changed. A few wrote that they learned how other cultures perceive the US.