
Language and Culture Department

Language Department's Mission

SIT Graduate Institute's Language and Culture Department pursues two related missions: to build and maintain a campus community rich in diversity and to provide language courses designed to meet the needs of students and others requiring or desiring language proficiency to enable them to function effectively in another culture.

Language and Culture Proficiency Requirements

It is highly recommended and strongly encouraged that students complete this requirement before departing campus after their first year. The language and culture proficiency requirement can be fulfilled in a variety of ways, depending upon the skills and needs of the student. Incoming students will participate in a self-assessment to help them determine the method of fulfillment most suitable to their goals and needs. This self-assessment will be carried out through a combination of advising by on-campus advisors and assessment of language skill by the SIT Language and Culture Department, the latter at the student's initiative. For all students, regardless of their selected option, study of a second language at SIT is strongly encouraged, including continued study of English, if appropriate.

For Native Speakers of Languages Other Than English

The requirement is fulfilled either: 1) by passing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with a score that satisfactorily meets the SIT admissions requirement or 2) by submitting a university transcript that demonstrates successful study at an English-medium university for at least four years prior to applying to SIT.

For Native Speakers of English

The following two options are available; the first is strongly recommended. If the first is not possible, a second option is available with the approval of the language requirement coordinator and the Language and Culture Department.

1. Focus on one language: The requirement is fulfilled by passing an ACTFL proficiency exam in a target language at the Intermediate High level (see www.actfl.org). This option would most likely fit the needs of students who already have strong skills in a foreign language and/or plan to work in a particular culture/country that requires that language.
2. Focus on sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and the role of language and culture in one's field of professional practice: The requirement is fulfilled by constructing a portfolio which documents the following:

- a) Taking and passing two semesters of language study at SIT, or their equivalent at another institution; documentation for the language and culture proficiency requirement will consist of a transcript showing successful completion of this study, plus
- b) Completing the 45-hour Guided Self-Instruction (or Field Guided Self-Instruction for students abroad) program through the SIT Language and Culture Department. Students may choose to do the Guided Self-Instruction (GSI) at any time during their studies and/or may do it as a short-term intensive study program. Documentation for the GSI will consist of all components as defined in the GSI handbook, plus
- c) Satisfactory accomplishment of one of the following:
 - Focus two major course papers or projects on issues of language and culture or language and intercultural communication; documentation for the language and culture proficiency requirement will consist of the papers plus the student's 3–5 page self-assessment of learning about language and culture.
 - Prepare and offer a workshop focused on language and intercultural communication for SIT, organization, or community audiences; documentation for the language and culture proficiency requirement will consist of the workshop outline and materials, a summary of participants' evaluation of the workshop, plus the student's 3–5 page self-assessment of learning about language and culture.
 - Focus one reflective practice question on language and culture.
 - Write an in-depth analytical paper on language and culture in the student's field of practice, 10–12 pages in length. Prior to seeking this option, the student must obtain approval of the paper's scope and topic from the language requirement coordinator.

Supervision

Initial assessment and decision-making: Students' advisors work in conjunction with Language and Culture Department staff to help students assess the best option for their needs and to supervise the incorporation of that option into the learning contract/advising process. Students hold the major responsibility for determining the best options for themselves and laying out the plan for fulfilling these with their advisors.

Monitoring of Progress

Students are responsible for monitoring their progress toward achieving the language and culture proficiency requirement. They may request assistance or reassessment from their advisors

or language proficiency coordinator. Students who have completed all other requirements for the degree except the language and culture proficiency requirement are not eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony.

Language Proficiency Assessment

The Language and Culture Department will evaluate language proficiency for option 1. For option 2, the language coordinator at the Language and Culture Department will evaluate the GSI report. The language proficiency coordinator will evaluate the other components of the portfolio and determine if the overall portfolio fulfills the language and culture requirement. The final overall grade for option 2 is assigned by the appointed graduate Language and Culture faculty.

Language Class Format

The department's language courses address the four skill areas—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—although emphasis is normally on aural/oral skills. To help students gain proficiency, language instructors employ a variety of communicative approaches. Classroom work emphasizes both the cultural appropriateness of language customs as well as grammatical accuracy.

In class, students are immediately involved in direct use of the language and are encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning process. Language and Culture Department staff are available to help students explore their personal learning styles and language learning strategies and help them plan their short- and long-term language learning. The department occasionally offers group training in language-learning strategies.

Language classes are participatory, communicative, and interactive. They include classroom instruction supplemented by homework, some of which may be computer-based. All courses, from beginning to advanced levels, address performance tasks, linguistic mastery, and the development of understanding attitudes toward the target language and culture. Classes meet twice weekly throughout each academic semester.

Language classes run for 12 weeks in the fall and spring semesters. Two-week intensive courses are offered in January. Classes are offered at several levels in Spanish and French, and also in a selection of less commonly taught languages (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese). American Sign Language classes are also available.

English as a Second Language (ESL) is offered at the advanced level for nonnative English-speaking SIT students immediately before the start of the academic year and from September through May. Courses strive to lead students to maximum achievement in accordance with their ability, objectives, and academic and professional goals. Students must make special arrangements for the Intensive Academic Preparation course that begins in August.

The Language and Culture Department offers a Guided Self-Instruction (GSI) option for students whose language learning needs fall outside classroom offerings. Enrollment in this option depends on the resources available, regular language classes offered, and program requirements.

To support all SIT students, the Language and Culture Department's Writing Lab provides writing-skills tutors during the academic year. Tutors work with students individually to improve their writing skills.

Evaluation

A Pass/No Pass grading system is used in all language classes. Pass/No Pass grades are assigned by language course instructors and are based on completion of course requirements and achievement. Courses are noted on official transcripts as part of the student's permanent academic record.

At the end of each term, instructors will also estimate proficiency levels using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines—Speaking. These estimates are for student information only and are not sufficient for program oral proficiency requirements.

Eligibility, Requirements, and Credits

Language classes are available to all SIT students as well as to World Learning staff and Brattleboro-area community members on a space-available basis. Enrollment priority is given to SIT students, then to community members, and then to World Learning staff, in that order.

Two undergraduate credits are awarded for the successful completion of language courses at any level. January intensive courses are offered for one or two credits depending on the course. Courses are only offered on a for-credit basis. SIT students are not permitted to audit language classes.

Students taking advantage of the GSI option will be awarded two undergraduate credits per semester upon satisfactory completion of their GSI portfolio.

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Language and Culture Department Course Descriptions

Language courses are designed according to curricula based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines—Speaking (see www.actfl.org). Student placement is based on a combination of self-assessment and standardized evaluations. All language courses include learning about the relevant cultures.

Beginning Language 1000

This is an introductory course for students with no prior background in the target language. Participants are introduced to sound and structure with an emphasis on the development of basic conversational skills, including necessary vocabulary. Completion of this level enables the individual to satisfy elementary needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Prerequisite: none; offered only in the fall semester and January intensive session.

High Beginning Language 1500

This course is a continuation of Beginning Language 1000. This course will focus on reinforcing the fundamentals for basic conversation as well as vocabulary. Additionally, students will expand their repertoire of key phrases necessary to express basic concepts.

Intermediate Language 2000

This course is designed to remediate and build upon existing skills, to expand knowledge of grammar, increase vocabulary, and further develop proficiency. Completion of this level enables the individual to satisfy routine demands in most social situations and engage in most nontechnical conversations. The course may be composed of students at various levels of intermediate proficiency. Depending on enrollment, the Language and Culture Department may offer several groups at the intermediate level; students will then be divided into sections based on assessed ability. Prerequisite: an ability to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances, often attainable from one to two years of study or use, or from experience in the field as assessed by placement testing.

Intermediate High Language 2500

An intermediate high language course builds on material learned in an Intermediate Language 2000 course. Students will work on building confidence conversing in the target language as well as language necessary for social exchanges of personal information.

Advanced Language 3000

In this course participants develop existing skills in language and culture at an advanced level with emphasis on their specific needs; advanced courses may include significant reading and writing requirements. Literary works may be included in the advanced curriculum. The goal of this course is to help students attain a high level of knowledge of and competence in the language in all four skill areas.

Prerequisite: a high degree of proficiency in the language as assessed by placement testing.

Guided Self-Instruction (GSI)

GSI is offered in a wide variety of less-commonly taught languages. Although the program attempts to accommodate all language requests, this is not always possible. The GSI curriculum has stringent requirements and is best suited for students who are highly motivated and self-disciplined. Students enroll in GSI-1000 (beginning), GSI-1500 (high beginning), GSI-2000 (intermediate), GSI-2500 (intermediate high), or GSI-3000 (advanced), based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines—Speaking. (See <http://www.actfl.org/performance-guidelines-faq> for details.)

Students may enroll for two GSI credits per semester. Students are required to purchase a GSI handbook and to design a course of language study according to their own individual goals and needs. Language learning goals are pursued through work with textual and audio or audiovisual materials and through regular meetings with fluent practice partners. Students are required to participate in group strategy sessions to develop effective self-directed language learning skills.

Advanced English

This course is designed to assist SIT students who are nonnative speakers of English in improving their English language skills. The focus of the course is to develop and strengthen academic writing skills and further develop speaking and listening skills. Students gain a better understanding of essay organization and unity, clarity of expression, and appropriate style. Through presentations, discussions, and the use of video, students gain confidence in expressing themselves in English, especially within the SIT context. English grammar structures are also taught.

Additionally, when SIT classes are in session, writing-skills tutors are available in the writing lab. In one-on-one sessions, tutors help students improve their writing skills by assisting them in evaluating their individual challenges and identifying strategies for more effective writing.