

## Second Languages and Jesuit Core Education: A Position Piece

“They were speaking in various languages.”

Acts 2:4

“Speak the truth in love.”

Ephesians 4:15

### *Position: Marquette University and the Core Study of Language*

Marquette University, like many other Jesuit and Catholic universities, is presently at a crossroads. In light of financial pressures brought about by a variety of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Administrators, Faculty, and Staff have all been confronted with difficult and unenviable choices. At a recent University Academic Senate meeting (9 Dec 2020), members of the Faculty Program Offerings Working Group (Ropella and Wichowsky, co-chairs) released a preliminary recommendation of potential “closure or significant restructuring” of several undergraduate majors. These include majors in German, French, and the Classics. Faculty Working Group members suggested that they had found no substantial financial benefit in such closures, but argued that the shrinking number of LLAC majors, resulting partially from the elimination of the University and College language requirements, was grounds for considering closure.

To the contrary, in light of the following considerations (“Narrative” and “Rationale” below) which demonstrate the core and inalienable place of the study of languages in a Catholic, Jesuit education, we propose the following:

- 1) That the Faculty Working Group on Program Offerings recommend that Marquette University not close the German, French, and the Classics majors, given the absence of *significant financial benefit*; and commit in any eventuality to maintaining full-time (TT) faculty presence in these three areas.
- 2) That the Faculty Working Group on Program Offerings recommend that Marquette University Admissions redouble its efforts to recruit students *in every college* already competent in a second language or with demonstrable interest in learning one.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) That the Faculty Working Group on Program Offerings recommend that the Klingler College of Arts and Sciences be given the resources not only to maintain the German, French, and Classics majors, but also (over the long term) to reintroduce “intermediate competency” in a foreign language as a college core requirement for both the BA and BS degrees, to support the growth of the language majors and to bring the College up to speed with peer institution A&S Colleges, including SLU, Boston College, Creighton, and Fordham (see Appendix).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jesuit core educational values argue that this should be one of the most significant screening factors in reading applications and determining fit for the ideal Marquette undergraduate student. This could, *inter alia*, support the admission of bilingual Latinx students, whom Marquette has committed to serving.

<sup>2</sup> This is the minimum language competency required for admission into Marquette’s chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and the baseline national standard of a liberal arts education.

## *Narrative*

Shortly after his arrival in Japan on October 15, 1938, the young Jesuit explorer, Father Pedro Arrupe (later, one of the Society's most innovative Superiors General), summited Mount Fujiyama before sunrise with a group of Jesuit brothers to celebrate the Eucharist in Latin. The journey to this point in his life had been nothing short of miraculous. Already well on the way to a promising medical career, Arrupe's first-hand experience of healings at Lourdes had catalyzed an about-face. Arrupe entered the Society of Jesus with the hopes of becoming a missionary.

Arrupe's medical training would return to help him when he survived the bombing of Hiroshima by the United States in 1945 and then turned his Jesuit residence into a hospital for the wounded. Even more fundamental to Arrupe's success, however, in his mission to serve as a healer in the technologically ravaged twentieth-century was his life-long study of languages. Born a Spanish-speaker in Basque country, Arrupe grew up in a trilingual environment. His further studies in Belgium and the United States, and ultimately his mission to Japan, led him speak six additional languages in the course of his life.<sup>3</sup> Arrupe was no linguist,<sup>4</sup> but this did not deter him from attending to the mother tongue of the people whom he served. In fact, it is all the more compelling that someone without a natural proclivity for picking up foreign languages nevertheless devoted so much time to their study. Like the first Apostles, Arrupe believed that God's change would come with the outpouring of languages.

In many ways, Arrupe's lifelong study of languages serves as a parable for what a Catholic, Jesuit education can accomplish. Against the temptation to solve problems with brute military technocracy—which in the atom bomb showed its most civilization-threatening and nihilistic potential—Arrupe testified to the necessity of globalization through face-to-face dialogue. This is not to suggest that science and technology did not have their place—indeed, one of the greatest miracles of Arrupe's life was his own medical training. But at a more fundamental level, Arrupe needed languages to be the difference and the *magis* that his times required. In what follows, it will be suggested that the study of languages teaches the academic virtues of attention, humility, and collaboration in a unique way, arguing for their inclusion and strengthening in Jesuit education.

### *Rationale: Second Languages and Three Academic Virtues*

Since the foundation of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius Loyola to the present day, the study of languages, both classical and modern, has formed a core and constituent charism of Jesuit education. Ignatius' own attention to the study of Latin—documented in his autobiography—served more than a practical theological purpose. Ignatius' **attention** to languages were a part of the same character that so famously attended to the various types of human souls who came to him for spiritual counsel. Out of these attentive engagements were born *The Spiritual Exercises*. Much in the same spirit, twentieth-century French philosopher Simone Weil (who had herself learned ancient Greek by twelve) suggests that attention to the nouns, verbs, and prepositions of another language is a training in attention to the lives of others—the *sine qua non* of the work of a global problem solver.

In addition to teaching attention, study of a second language is necessary to teach another core academic virtue: **humility**. Mark Noll, Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, has argued that it is

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jesuit.org.sg/feb-5th-pedro-arrupe-sj/>

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ: <https://www.catholicireland.net/pedro-arrupe-sj/>.

above all the learning of a foreign language that teaches a student his or her limitations, and that this is one of the most valuable skills in forming lifelong moral character.<sup>5</sup> There are no shortcuts in learning a language; one is confronted again and again by limit and frustration (cf. Genesis 11). Such experiences teach students better than any other exercise to know themselves in a certain way.

Finally, the study of another language teaches the necessity of **cooperation**. At the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, in the Henry Ford Building of the Freie Universität in Berlin, Humboldt President Hans-Christian Pape, Professor of Neurophysiology,<sup>6</sup> addressed a worldwide gathering of scientific and humanistic researchers and argued that the borders that truly divide us are not the political ones, which we can cross, but the linguistic ones that we cannot. Science, innovation, and economies at their finest are hindered by these borders more than by national ones. Only those who have tried to conduct research and trade across linguistic boundaries, Pape suggested, are fully aware of the requirements of effective international cooperation.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Knoll, panel response at the Lilly Fellows Network National Meeting, The University of Scranton, October 2013.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/explore/organisation/the-president>

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## Appendix

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY (A&S): “The foreign language requirement of the core will be satisfied when you achieve an intermediate level of proficiency in a language other than English. You may transfer appropriate academic credit.”<sup>7</sup>

BOSTON COLLEGE (A&S, Management): “The Language Proficiency Requirement encourages a holistic educational model for all undergraduate students so that they may graduate with a global, cross-cultural perspective. Language proficiency can be demonstrated in both modern and classical languages, and the requirement applies to students in both the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) and the Carroll School of Management (CSOM).”<sup>8</sup>

CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY (A&S): “Arts and Sciences students must fulfill the Foreign Language requirement as a part of the Explorations level of the Magis Core Curriculum. Students must successfully complete a language to the intermediate level, completing the 112 level course in a language, to fulfill the foreign language requirement.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.slu.edu/arts-and-sciences/student-resources/core-curriculum/core-requirements.php>; SLU’s new University Core (2022) eliminates a specific second language requirement.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GWVsiwHZAoNorm6Z65h-kxQJSsC7Ki7x/view>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/romance-languages/undergraduate-programs/language-programs/spanish-language-program/where-to-start/language-requirement.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.creighton.edu/ccas/modernlanguages/languagerequirement/>

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY (A&S): “In order to fulfill Fordham's foreign language core requirement in one of the languages offered in the department, you must pass the 2001-level course in this language (or SPAN 2301 for heritage speakers of Spanish), or demonstrate written and oral proficiency in the language above this level.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.fordham.edu/info/20844/language\\_course\\_sequence/1993/language\\_placement](https://www.fordham.edu/info/20844/language_course_sequence/1993/language_placement)