An Evaluation of Lower-Level Modern Language Courses at the University of Mississippi: The Student Perspective

by

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Abstract

This study provides an evaluation of the effectiveness of the lower-level modern language courses at the University of Mississippi. Evaluations and opinions about the lower-level modern language courses at the University of Mississippi were collected from students via an anonymous online survey. After analysis, it was found that the students enrolled in modern language courses are very diverse. Many students had a positive experience in the lower-language courses, while others had negative experiences. It was found that the goals set by the Department of Modern Languages for students are being reached by many students; however, there are many students who choose to reject the messages provided within the context of the foreign language classroom.
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Introduction

In May 1999, former United States Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta said, “The prevalent practice of offering and sometimes requiring one or two years of foreign language study for high school or college graduation is simply inadequate for giving students meaningful competence in foreign languages” (Panetta, 1999). Panetta went on to describe the history of foreign language education in the U.S. and the direction that he believed such education needed to go in order to be successful. He argued that society was becoming globalized and the people of the world would become even more connected as we entered the 21st century.

Looking at our world today, Panetta had the right idea: people have the ability to connect with others from anywhere in the world; the Internet allows communication across any distance with the click of a button; it is fairly easy to travel and spend time in another culture; and politics and business are practiced on a very large international scale. The United States, being a prominent country, provides its citizens access to participate in this interconnected world that is the present reality.

Foreign language study at the University of Mississippi (UM) has had a long history in the College of Liberal Arts. According to the current chair of the department, Dr. Donald Dyer, foreign languages have been taught since 1852 (Dyer, interview). It is logical, therefore, that UM requires all undergraduate students earning a degree through the College of Liberal Arts to enroll in foreign language courses to complete six semester
hours at or above the 200-level (UM Undergraduate Catalog, 2015). UM is not alone in this. Other similar institutions, such as the University of Alabama (Alabama Undergraduate Catalog, 2015) and Mississippi State University (MS State Undergraduate Catalog, 2015) also require their undergraduate students in the College of Liberal Arts (or College of Arts and Sciences) to earn a set number of foreign language credits in order to graduate.

For students today, foreign language requirements are nothing new. In 1999, Panetta cited that more than 70% of students arriving at universities had taken at least two years of a foreign language (Panetta, 1999), indicating that a majority of students were studying a foreign language in high school and continuing their language study at the university level.

The current study came about out of curiosity surrounding the effectiveness of the foreign language requirement, and, by extension, the basic level (100- and 200-level) language courses at the University of Mississippi. Thousands of students enroll in these courses every year (Dyer, interview), but do they want to attend? If they do not want to study a language, what do they gain from the experience in the foreign language classroom, if anything? If students do want to study language, are the lower-level courses satisfying their wants and needs? If students do not have an opinion either way, are the courses structured in such a way that they could foster interest in foreign language and/or provide some type of recognizable benefit to the student?
All of these questions led to the main inquiry discussed in this study: Are the lower-level language courses at UM fulfilling their purpose to the university and, from a student perspective, beneficial?

Through a survey sent to students who have had experience in the lower-level courses and in conversations with the chair of the Department of Modern Languages, the above question is explored. Students with a variety of courses participated in the study and allowed for a great deal of comparison to each other and provided the opportunity to examine the functionality of the lower-level language courses and, by extension, the decision by the university to require students to study a foreign language.

Why is this important? Students who attend the university want to take classes that they believe will be beneficial to them in life after college. Looking into the success of the lower-level language courses from a student perspective is important because the courses are designed for them in the most effective and valuable curricula that the Department of Modern Languages can construct. The courses should be beneficial to the students in an identifiable and appreciable way.

This study will begin with a review of the important literature related to the topics of language acquisition, student motivation, and the benefits of language study. Next, the methodology of the study will be explained, followed by a detailed summary of the results found through the student survey. Finally, these results will be discussed as relates to the main inquiry of this investigation, and conclusions will be drawn about the student perceptions and validity of their opinions of foreign language study at UM.
**Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a small knowledge base for the topics that will be discussed in later chapters of this study. First, the topic of language acquisition is addressed. This study does not focus on student language acquisition; however it is a factor that is included in the evaluation of the lower-level language courses. Within this topic, age (as it relates to language acquisition) and language competency are addressed. Next, some of the benefits of language study will be noted. Finally, this chapter will look at student motivation in the context of language study. Motivation is a prominent topic in this study because it helps explain why students are studying language, which can be connected to their feelings about language study in general.

**Language Acquisition**

It would be impossible to have a discussion about language courses without first talking about language acquisition. This study does not deal directly with language acquisition; however language acquisition is a major component and goal of language study. The language acquisition field of research is a very broad one. For the purposes of this study, this chapter will provide a short collection of information about some of the main ideas of the subject area.

One of the most hotly debated subjects in the field of language acquisition is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). The critical period is a time, generally thought to be
before the onset of puberty, after which language acquisition to the level of a native speaker is not possible. Following this idea, if an individual begins language study within the critical period they will be more able to attain a second language than if they began learning after this period. Alternatively to the Critical Period Hypothesis is the idea of a sensitive period, a time during which individuals are more sensitive to acquiring different aspects of language (Slabakova, 2013). There is a very large body of research and many debates surrounding the CPH, but for the purpose of this paper the acknowledgment of its meaning is sufficient in order to consider it within other topics more thoroughly discussed.

A topic more relevant to this study when it comes to language acquisition is the time it takes to acquire a second language. While the current study only addresses second language acquisition in the classroom setting, there are many environments in which a student can learn a language. Additionally, in each of these settings the time it takes to acquire a language can vary. This simple question does not have a simple answer because there are many variables that can affect the amount of time it takes for someone to acquire a language; then there is the question of what level of competency is seen as the point at which a language is acquired. It is important that the length of time needed to acquire a language is not completely separate from the age at which a student starts to learn. In most studies regarding language acquisition, age of onset (age at start of language study/learning) is strongly considered.

Virginia P. Collier attempts to answer the question of how long language acquisition takes in her 1989 study by addressing variables, mostly connected with age, that can affect language acquisition and referencing studies that focused on those
variables. One variable slightly connected to the CPH is the effect of one’s developmental state in their first language on the acquisition of a second. Collier states that developed first language skills can aid in the acquisition of second language skills. Krashen, Scarella, & Long (1982), cited in Collier (1989) found that older children and adults can move more quickly through the early stages of language development, such as “syntactic and morphological development” (p. 513), than students who began language study at an earlier age. This finding is connected with the phenomenon of first language influence because older students have already gained the skills to identify the more simple aspects of language due to their experience acquiring their first language. Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) (cited in Collier, 1989) conducted a study that looked into this idea and found that it was true, however it was also found that this was a short term advantage of older learners. As study language instruction went on, learners that began at a younger age began to outperform older learners.

Another way Collier explores the length of acquisition is by examining studies on young children and adolescents learning a second language who were schooled completely in the target language. Collier (1987) and Collier and Thomas (1988), cited in Collier (1989), performed length of acquisition studies with immigrant children in the US who started learning English by being schooled only in English after they arrived. Results of these studies showed that students took five to seven years to reach the 50th percentile (as compared to native speakers) on standard tests. This is clearly a very isolated group of students; however the conclusions could be extended to some degree to other students learning a second language. If it took these students, who had been immersed in the target language, five to seven years to reach the level of proficiency stated above, it could be
posited that students learning a second language in a much less intensive format would take longer to reach the same level of competency.

In addition to length of time needed, the topic of language competence is an important part of language acquisition. There are many ways to evaluate language competence. The American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has created a set of guidelines that describe what an individual can do with their language skills in the areas of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. In each subject, students can gain a proficiency rating of Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. Within each subject and each rating, the ACTFL has provided specific skills that individuals should be able to produce spontaneously in everyday life (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012). Specific organizations also have the ability to evaluate language skills. Figure 1 shows how the U.S. government rates a speaker on their language proficiency in the areas of speaking and reading. Within each proficiency level, specific skills are listed for each subject.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Code</th>
<th>Speaking Definitions</th>
<th>Reading Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - No Practical Proficiency</td>
<td>No practical speaking proficiency.</td>
<td>No practical reading proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - Elementary Proficiency</td>
<td>Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements</td>
<td>Able to read some personal and place names, street signs, office and shop designations, numbers and isolated words and phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Limited Working Proficiency</td>
<td>Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements</td>
<td>Able to read simple prose, in a form equivalent to typescript or printing, on subjects within a familiar context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Minimum Professional Proficiency</td>
<td>Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics</td>
<td>Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence, reports, and technical materials in the individual's special field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Full Professional Proficiency</td>
<td>Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels pertinent to professional needs.</td>
<td>Able to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Native or Bilingual Proficiency</td>
<td>Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.</td>
<td>Equivalent to that of an educated native.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Language Proficiency Definitions, Source: U.S. Department of State

This evaluation only evaluates skill in reading and speaking, however it gives a clear definition of the real world tasks that a speaker should have the ability to perform at any given level of competence. These Proficiency Definitions do provide a good basis for evaluation, but this is not typical for an educational setting.

In the classroom, progress needs to be evaluated in order for instructors to properly observe how well their students are retaining the material being taught. Gass and Selinker (1994) provide four possibilities for evaluation and also cite their potential shortcomings. First, there is the possibility for self-evaluation for the students. This method is good because it allows to the student to reflect on how they feel about their
skills, however it is not flawless because there is not a scale for measuring how comfortable someone is with a certain skill. Another method of evaluation is attempting to evaluate a student’s ability to use the target language through conversation or proficiency tests. These options have potential, however a single conversation may not be reliable and proficiency may be aided by student memory (of similar topics previously discussed in class), not production ability. Finally, the most common method of evaluation is grading. Gass and Selinker (2004) state, however, “The reason this is an unfortunate measure is that getting good grades is not always equivalent to success in knowing and using a second or foreign language” (p. 235).

**Benefits of Language Study**

Beyond the obvious goal of language acquisition that is associated with foreign language study, there are additional gains that can be reaped from the study of another language. A study conducted by Angela Gallager-Brett titled, “Seven hundred reasons for studying languages” (2016) synthesizes student answers along with research done by other professionals to create an extensive list of reasons why students should study a foreign language. Within this synthesis, Gallager-Brett provides a list of 70 “key words” that categorized the research collected and the responses of the students. As stated in the article, the list of reasons to study a foreign language has the potential to promote language study as well as suggest design for language courses.

The benefits of language learning are extensive. Foreign language study can positively influence cognitive processes (Swarbrick, 2002:14); studying a foreign language abroad displays “highly autonomous learning” (Coleman, 2004); it can provide
an opportunity for critical evaluation of oneself (Byram, 2002: 47) while also providing students with the opportunity to become more aware of themselves in their own culture, which can lead to benefits in other academic endeavors as well (Byram, 1997:57). Additionally, language study leads to multilingualism, which can influence countries, business, and communities on a large scale while also allowing an individual to grow. King and Johnstone (2001) note that the idea of multilingualism is the best way to understand and/or appreciated strangers. Language instruction also creates ability to interact with new people of different languages and cultures than our own, a skill that one otherwise would not have (Tinsley, 2003:154) and “provide enjoyment and enhance personal confidence (Williams, 2001:44) (all above cited in Gallager-Brett). All of these benefits can be seen separately, however there is one theme that can be found in nearly every one of these benefits: the gain of cultural awareness.

Cultural awareness has a prominent role in language study even though it is not generally considered to be one of the four main skills involved with language learning, which are reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Cultural understanding in generally perceived thought of being acquired in three ways: (1) as an automatic result of language instruction, (2) as a cognitive process (something to be learned and retained), and (3) as “part of the process of living and being in the world” (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996).

For many years cultural awareness (or acquisition as it is referred to in the study presented by Robinson-Stuart & Nocon) was believed to come about as a result of simply receiving language instruction. Robinson (1978b), cited in Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996), called this phenomena “‘magic-carpet-ride-to-another-culture syndrome’”;
suggesting that it is illogical to assume students have the ability to acquire an appreciation for a culture that is not familiar to them by simply studying a language. Culture as has also been viewed as simple knowledge, “a list of facts to be cognitively consumed in the development of a culture knowledge base” (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996).

Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) however, present the idea that cultural acquisition is a process and that students need to be actively guided to the point of cultural understanding. The study shows undergraduate university students participating in a series of ethnographic interviews that carry the purpose of opening students’ eyes and minds to the Spanish-speaking culture of Mexico and the Spanish speaking individuals in the communities surrounding San Diego State University. These interviews had students take time to speak with an individual from their target language and associated culture to dig deeper into their similarities and differences.

Their study provided very interesting results. At the start of the study, a poll was conducted and it was found that 60% of the participants were only taking a Spanish course because they were required to do so. This statistic also correlated to a general negative attitude towards language study. However, after the students participated in this study, many students had an altered perspective and began to see the value of language study. This finding is important because these students essentially had “hostile” attitudes about taking language courses, but ended the study with positive attitudes and a degree of cultural understanding (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996).
All of the information provided by this study suggests that acquiring cultural awareness can be crucial to the language study process because it has the potential to turn anger into understanding. Additionally, as suggested by Gallager-Brett and Robinson-Stuart & Nocon (1996), the cultural and other benefits of acquiring a second language have importance on an individual and societal level.

**Motivation**

Motivation is what drives people to think and act the way they do and it is the force behind the “direction and magnitude of human behavior” (Dörnyei 1994). Dörnyei (1994) breaks the general principal of motivation down into three parts: (1) the choice, (2) persistence with that choice, and (3) the effort expended on that choice. The choice involves what and why a person makes a decision, persistence describes how long a person is willing to work towards a particular goal, and effort is simply how hard a person is willing to work in order to accomplish a goal. Motivation is a complicated concept, especially when it is considered within the realm of learning. Individuals choose to study certain topics for many different reasons, and at some point those reasons may change and progress or may disappear altogether.

Dörnyei (1994) states, “Motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement,” (p. 273). Robert. C. Gardner, a Canadian psychologist, was one of the first to look into motivation as it pertains to language learning, and his ideas were held unchallenged as the standard for many years. Gardner (1985; cited in Shabitha and Mekala 2013) divides motivation into two broad categories to describe the motivation that pushes students to learn a new language:
instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Gardner defines instrumental motivation as the desire to learn a language because of some perceived value to the learner. Under this definition, the value to the learner is that the new language will be a tool of some kind in the learner’s future. This tool could allow for increased qualification for a new job, a pay increase in a current job, the ability to travel, or the fulfilment of a requirement. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is present when a learner chooses to learn a language because he or she wants to become integrated into the community of people who speak the target language. These desires generally stem from positive feelings toward a certain group and a desire to interact with them (Dörnyei 1994).

When comparing instrumental and integrative motivation, instrumental motivation is the less complicated of the two divisions. For the purpose of this paper, the target of study is the learning of a second/foreign language. Many factors can affect the influence of instrumental motivation on a learner. For example, the social situation of an individual can affect the intensity of his or her motivation (Ellis 2008). A person in a situation in which he or she is trying to survive in a place where his or her first language is not spoken may have no interest in learning the common language of that place except that it will be a powerful tool for survival. A situation like this could result in a high level of instrumental motivation.

Finding an instrumental motive for learning is not difficult because it can be nearly anything that is perceived as reward. Maintaining instrumental motivation over time, however, can prove to be difficult. Gardner and MacIntyre (1992; cited in Ellis 2008) talk about an early study (Dunkel 1948) in which a group of students learning Farsi were offered financial rewards for good performance, while a second group was not
offered such a reward. The students offered the reward scored significantly better on the
given tests than the students who were not receiving a reward. On the last test, however,
the reward was taken away from the students in the first group, and their scores were no
longer better than those of the second group. This test may be an extreme example,
considering that students are generally not rewarded with money in a classroom setting;
however, it showed that instrumental motivation may not last. If a student loses sight of
the perceived value of learning a second language, he or she runs the risk of ceasing to
put forth enough effort to be successful.

The idea of instrumental motivation is generally straightforward. The concept of
integrative motivation, on the other hand, is much more complex. Ellis (2008) states,
“Integrative motivation does not affect language learning directly; rather its effect is
mediated by the learning behaviors that it instigates.” Integrative motivation has been
thoroughly researched in the context of language learning and has been broken down into
different components and underlying theories that help to explain how it affects learners.

Gardner (1985; cited in Dörnyei 1994) further breaks his concept of integrative
motivation into three subsections. The first subsection is integrativeness, which is the
amount of interest in a foreign language and the community that speaks it. The second
subsection is the learner’s attitude toward the learning situation, specifically attitudes
towards the teacher and the course itself. Finally, the third subsection is motivational
intensity, defined as a learner’s desire to learn related to the effort that he or she exerts.
Additionally, Dörnyei references his previous work from 1990 with very similar
components after the study of young adult learners. He identifies the three components
that Gardner proposed, with the addition of mentioning the “desire to broaden one’s horizons” as a subsection of integrative motivation.

One important theory that directly relates to integrative motivation is the Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). This theory deals with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which strongly connect to integrative and instrumental motivation respectively, and how they are connected to each other. To begin, intrinsic motivation is inspired by something that will be or is internally rewarding to the learner. This reward could be satisfying some curiosity, attaining joy in some way, or many other events or states that are personally rewarding, yet not tangible. Deci and Ryan (1985; cited in Dörnyei 1994) say that “whenever students’ natural curiosity and interest energize their learning,” it is because there is a level of intrinsic motivation present. As a result, intrinsic motivation can be a driving force as students continue to study.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, leads to behaviors inspired by the desire for something that can be earned, a reward more tangible than joy or curiosity (Dörnyei 1994). Based on the definitions given of extrinsic motivation and instrumental motivation, the two are closely connected. For example, if we reconsider the study referenced in Ellis (2008) concerning the students given the opportunity for reward while learning Farsi, it is an example of an extrinsic motivator: the reward was outside the learners that pushed them to perform the given task.

Although extrinsic motivators are not necessarily as profound as integrative/intrinsic motivators, they can be very powerful forces for a learner. Dörnyei (1994) explains that proximal or short term goals such as exams and tests in an
educational setting can be very powerful when it comes to encouraging students to be more motivated. Proximal motivators can be key to keeping students motivated throughout the time it takes to complete a language course or reach their desired goals in their language study. Time, as Dörnyei and Skenan (2003) point out, is a variable that cannot be ignored when it comes to language study or any other educational endeavor.

Proximal motivators provide more frequent opportunities for students to be successful, which can aid students in not losing sight of their long term goals in language study. This frequent success and achievement of extrinsic rewards in the form of good test grades can inspire a student to continue studying a foreign language. As a further effect, this inspiration could eventually lead to intrinsic interest and therefore integrative motivation and continued study due to his or her positive experience in the learning environment. This potential shift to intrinsic/integrative motivation can be very helpful when it comes to longevity of language study. According to Hernández (2006; cited in Shrum and Glisan, 2010), students in post-secondary education with a high level integrative motivation generally reach a higher level of oral proficiency and have a stronger desire to continue studying their target languages.

Although proximal motivators and extrinsic motivators can be very helpful and lead to success and potentially more powerful forms of motivation, they can also be dangerous within an academic setting. Ushioda (1996) is quoted in Dörnyei and Skenan (2003) as stating, “Within the context of institutionalized learning especially, the common experience would seem to be motivational flux rather than stability.” This is important because, as Dörnyei (1994) points out, “several studies have confirmed that students will lose their natural intrinsic interest in an activity if they have to do it to meet
some extrinsic requirement. This occurs, for example, often when students are required to read books for class.” Extrinsic motivators, therefore, cannot be completely relied upon if they have the potential to turn the learner away from learning.

The overlap and exchange between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in the educational setting draws a connection between instrumental and integrative motivations. Gardner (1985) originally declared that the two were separate and distinct. However, research over the years has shown that the two types of motivation are complicated, fluid, and can be affected by a multitude of factors both inside and outside the learner and by each other.

Up to this point, the factors affecting motivation that have been addressed have mainly been extrinsic in nature. There are, however, internal factors in the form of cognitive components that can affect a learner’s motivation (Dörnyei 1994). According to Dörnyei (1994), these cognitive components are explained by a series of theories and concepts, including Attribution Theory, learned helplessness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. Attribution Theory describes how a learner’s future expectations of learning are affected by his or her past successes or failures. Dörnyei and Skenan (2003) state that this theory is concerned with how students process their past academic experiences. Closely related is the idea of self-efficacy, defined as an individual’s judgment on his or her own ability to perform a task (Dörnyei 1994). Positive self-efficacy is helpful to the learning process. Negative self-efficacy, however, can be very discouraging and potentially lead to learned helplessness, which is experienced by a learner when he or she has the desire to succeed and learn, but he or she has put themselves in a state of mind in which he or she believes that success is impossible (Dörnyei 1994). Finally, self-
confidence can play a major role in learner success. Positive and negative self-confidence are respectively related to positive and negative self-efficacy and their effects.

All of these cognitive components have the ability to affect an individual’s intrinsic motivation and desires. Based on all the above research, it can be assumed that if a learner does not have a reason to learn that is personally valuable or important, he or she will have no reason to start or continue learning a language. Lightbown and Spada (2006) point out that a positive attitude towards learning can lead to learning success, and the reverse is true as well. This brings about two potential situations with which learners can start their language learning: (1) motivated from the start or (2) the potential gain motivation through success. Both of these are common in the learning environment, and the environment needs to be designed in a way that cultivates continued motivation in both types of students.
Methods

For this study, undergraduate students at the University of Mississippi (UM) who were previously enrolled in or are currently enrolled in a basic level (100- or 200-level) foreign language course were asked to participate in a 15-question survey about the foreign language requirement enforced by the College of Liberal Arts and their experience in such courses they have taken.

This study was approved by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board before opening the survey to respondents.

The questions asked in the survey asked about their demographics, their choice of language, and their opinions about their language study

1. Are you 18 years or older?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. Did you have any foreign language instruction prior to attending the University of Mississippi?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. If yes to the above question, for how long did you receive instruction?
   a. Open ended response
4. How many modern or ancient language credit hours have you completed at the University of Mississippi?
   a. 0
   b. 3
   c. 6
   d. 7 or more

5. Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?
   a. Open ended response

6. Which language have you studied/are you studying at the University of Mississippi?
   a. Open ended response

7. Have your 100- and 200-level classes prepared you to speak the language you are learning?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. How would you describe your ability to communicate in your studied language?
   a. Open ended response

9. Would you feel comfortable studying abroad after taking only 100 and 200 level foreign language courses? Why or why not?
   a. Open ended response
10. Were you previously aware that all undergraduate students at the University of Mississippi earning a degree through the Liberal Arts College are required to earn 6 hours of foreign language credit at or above the 200 level?
   a. Yes
   b. No

11. What do you believe is the purpose of the 6 hour foreign language requirement?
   a. Open ended response

12. What have you gained from taking 100- and/or 200-level foreign language classes at the University of Mississippi?
   a. Open ended response

13. How did your experience compare to your expectations in your foreign language classes?
   a. Open ended response

14. How could your experience have been improved?
   a. Open ended response

15. Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?
   a. Open ended response

The survey was conducted through Google Forms, which was chosen because it allowed for unlimited responses, easy access for UM students, and the ability to restrict responses to individuals with university email addresses. Students received the survey with the help of the University of Mississippi Modern Languages Department. Respondents were chosen on the basis of their status as an undergraduate student as well
as having taken a basic level foreign language course in a physical classroom at UM. I did not know the names of the students who responded, as Google Forms allows for anonymity.

The survey was open for 10 consecutive days, during which I received 208 responses. After the survey was closed, I analyzed the survey responses and omitted unsuitable responses (i.e. incomplete surveys or those from students who had never taken a foreign language). I evaluated answers individually for completeness and then compared them to identify connections between responses to the same questions and across topics.

In addition to the student survey, I conducted an interview with the chair of the Department of Modern Languages, Dr. Donald L. Dyer. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, during which we discussed the goals of the basic level foreign language courses and the hopes he and the department have for students enrolled in those courses. The information obtained during this interview is used to compare the student and departmental expectations.
Results

In the previous chapter, I outlined the parameters of this study including the student selection, the presentation and execution of the student survey, and the process of interviewing Dr. Donald Dyer of the Department of Modern Languages about the purpose and goals of the basic level language courses offered at UM.

This chapter discusses the results of the student survey. It begins with examining some basic information about the student responders as well as provides information about the greater UM population of students enrolled in foreign language courses. Next, the chapter presents information about student motivation. In this context, student motivation is seen while examining why students enrolled in basic level foreign language courses and while examining if students will continue foreign language study beyond the basic requirement. Finally, this chapter concludes by presenting information regarding the student experience within the basic level foreign language courses.

In total, 208 students responded to the foreign language evaluation survey. After review, 10 responses were omitted because they did not fit the requirements for this study, leaving the remaining 198 responses as clear and precise. The requirements for students to qualify for this study include: (1) the student has taken at least one 100- or 200-level modern language course or were enrolled in such a course at the time of the survey and (2) the student took a 100- or 200-level modern language course in the
traditional classroom setting at the University of Mississippi.

General Information about Subjects

Table 1: Distribution of Studied Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Studied</th>
<th>Number of Responders</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Language</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL RESPONDERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>198</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the languages studied by the student responders as indicated by question 6 of the survey. More than half, 56%, of responders have studied or are studying Spanish, while all other languages represented make up less than 10% each. Those responders under “Two Languages” indicated that they studied two different languages at the 100- or 200-level, and those under “Three Languages” indicated three languages studied at the 100 or 200 level. The two responses categorized under “Not stated” did not respond to this question with a specific language; however each individual answered all other questions appropriately. This distribution of studied languages is representative of
the student population at the University of Mississippi, with Spanish being the most widely studied language.
# Modern Languages Enrollments, 2004-2013

## Academic Year Enrollment by Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2467</td>
<td>2406</td>
<td>2412</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>3201</td>
<td>3537</td>
<td>3288</td>
<td>3999</td>
<td>3888</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1a; Source: University of Mississippi Department of Modern Languages
Table 1a presents the number of students enrolled in the different languages offered within the Department of Modern Languages each academic year starting with the 2004-2005 year and continuing through the 2012-2013 academic year. As seen in the table, an overwhelming majority of students over the years have chosen to enroll in Spanish. Additionally, starting in 2007-08, Spanish enrollment has increased each year. Based on this data, the three most popular languages other than Spanish are French, Italian, and German respectively.

When comparing Tables 1 and 1a, the largest similarity is the percentage of students enrolled in Spanish. In this study, 56% of students noted Spanish as their studied language, and in the 2012-2013 academic year, 64% of students enrolled in a foreign language were enrolled in a Spanish class. Additionally, French was found to be the second most popular language in this study and based on the data provided by the UM Department of Modern Languages.

Table 2: Previous Credits Earned at UM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Language Credits Earned by Students</th>
<th>16%  (n=32 )</th>
<th>25%  (n=49 )</th>
<th>15%  (n=30 )</th>
<th>44%  (n=87 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foreign language requirement under the College of Liberal Arts requires all students earning a degree to complete six hours of study at or above the 200 level. The data in Table 2 gives perspective on how far into the requirement each student is and how much experience each one has within the Modern Languages Department. Responders were also asked in questions 2 and 3 of the survey about their experiences with language
study before studying at the University of Mississippi. After compiling the data, 93% of students had experience with language learning before UM, while only 7% had no experience. The amount of experience is extremely varied. Of those with experience, the least indicated was one semester, while others stated that they have studied a foreign language since childhood. The majority of students, however, stated that they had between one and four years of experience from their time in high school.

**Motivation for Language Study**

A prominent theme of the survey was the students’ motivation for taking a foreign language course and their motivation, or lack thereof, to continue foreign language study beyond the six hour requirement under the College of Liberal Arts. Table 3 shows the breakdown into terms of instrumental and integrative motivation as to why the responding students took a foreign language class at UM. The final cell labeled “Mix of Instrumental and Integrative” describes students who indicated the need to fulfill a requirement, but also a level of enjoyment in their language courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Motivation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>n = 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>n = 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of Instrumental and Integrative</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>n = 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instrumental and integrative motivations given by the students are shown in Tables 4 and 5. The left columns give the reason for taking a foreign language course and the right
column shows the percentage of students within the motivation category who gave each reason.

Table 4: Instrumental Motivation Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Motivation</th>
<th>Percentage (n=)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree/major/program requirement</td>
<td>87% (n=114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>3% (n= 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Education/program merit</td>
<td>4% (n= 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool for other academic work</td>
<td>.7% (n= 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Application</td>
<td>5.3% (n=7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows those students who were categorized as instrumentally motivated, with an overwhelming 87% noting a requirement as their motivation for language study. All others saw some type of future use associated with language study.

Table 5: Integrative Motivation Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrative Motivation</th>
<th>Percentage (n=)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earning a major or minor</td>
<td>7% (n= 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys language learning</td>
<td>84% (n= 39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in culture surrounding a specific language</td>
<td>9% (n= 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Integrative motivation is not as divided as instrumental motivation because it is either present or it is not. Earning a major or minor is categorized as a form of integrative motivation because majors and minors are chosen by the student, usually because they
enjoy that area of study. Therefore, students choosing to major or minor in a language can be assumed to have integrative motivation.

**Continuation of Language Study beyond Requirement**

Question 15, the final question, asked students about their plans to continue study beyond the basic Liberal Arts requirement. Tables 6-9 show the information derived from responses to this question. Table 6 shows the plans of all 198 responders. Table 7 shows the reasons for those continuing, Table 8 shows the reasons for potential continuation, and Table 9 shows students’ reasons for ending their language study after the required amount.

**Table 6: Desire to Continue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will continue Language Study</th>
<th>52% (n=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May continue Language Study</td>
<td>16% (n=32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not continue Language Study</td>
<td>32% (n=63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7: Reasons for Continuation of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Continuation</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire to reach fluency</td>
<td>13% (n=13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys language learning</td>
<td>20% (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major/minor in language</td>
<td>36% (n=37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in cultures/language learning</td>
<td>8% (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future use/Career application</td>
<td>8% (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel/Study Abroad application</td>
<td>6% (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow international horizons/invest in global community</td>
<td>3% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave no reason</td>
<td>6% (n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Reasons for Potential Continuation of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time</td>
<td>47% (n= 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See future value, desire to learn more</td>
<td>31% (n= 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave no reason</td>
<td>22% (n= 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Reasons for Ending Language Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No personal need</td>
<td>14% (n= 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislikes classroom environment/methods</td>
<td>6% (n= 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too difficult to learn/class is too difficult</td>
<td>9% (n= 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a bad experience/not interested in further learning</td>
<td>12% (n= 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language study is unnecessary and/or unimportant</td>
<td>23% (n= 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time</td>
<td>18% (n= 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monetary reasons</td>
<td>1% (n= 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave no reason</td>
<td>17% (n= 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Language Requirement and Classroom Experience**

Students were asked if they had previously known that the College of Liberal Arts had a foreign language requirement for their students. A full 55% of students (109 in total) knew that there was a language requirement for Liberal Arts students, while 45% did not (89 students). This information simply provides extra context for responses and shows the extent to which students at UM are informed about the university.

Students were also asked to state what they believed to be the purpose of the foreign language requirement. There answers are shown in Table 10.
Most students stated that the requirement was for the betterment of the students, using terms such as “broadening horizons” or “well-rounded education” or “globalization.” These results show that, regardless of their success in a course or their desire to continue language study, students usually identified some value to language learning. The 9%, however, who responded negatively all reference the idea that language study is pointless or that the requirement of all students to study a foreign language is a bad idea. As follow-up questions, students were also asked what they gained from their experience in foreign language class, if their expectations were met, and in what ways they believe the foreign language experience at UM could be improved. Their responses to these open-ended questions will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Ability to Speak a Foreign Language

To some degree, students expect to gain some ability to speak a foreign language when they take a foreign language course. In this survey, students were asked to evaluate their own ability to speak the foreign language that they chose to study. To maintain privacy, student grades were not collected to examine this area. Table 10 shows the

Table 10: Purpose of Foreign Language Requirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broaden horizons, created well rounded students, teach language skills, prepare students for globalized future</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>n= 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>n= 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave negative response about requirement</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>n= 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
responses to question 7, “Have your 100- and 200-level classes prepared you to speak the language you are learning?”

Table 11: Speaking Ability

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70% (n= 139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30% (n= 59)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a follow-up question, students were asked to describe their ability to communicate in the language that they studied and if they would feel comfortable studying abroad in a country where the language they studied was spoken. This question is useful because it forced students to decide if they would be able to survive only speaking another language. Of those students who answered that they felt prepared to speak the language they were learning, 29% said that they would not feel comfortable studying abroad.

The students’ self-evaluation of their speaking ability is important to identify because it has the potential either positively or negatively to influence their experience in a foreign language course. The concept of influence will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

In conclusion, the 198 respondents who qualified for this study provide a good sample for evaluation of the general student population enrolled in foreign language courses. From the gathered data, conclusions are drawn about the demographics of the foreign language student population at UM. In the next chapter, motivation, both to enroll in a foreign language course and to continue language study, are discussed at length.
Additionally, the data found in the final two sections of this chapter will be discussed to gain perspective about the value of the student experience within the basic level foreign language courses.
Discussion

In the previous section, the results of this study presented in Tables 1, 1a, and 2 provide basic information about the students who participated as well as the enrollment numbers of UM foreign language students. Table 1 shows that 198 students responded appropriately to the survey and that they studied 10 different languages. Table 1 is easily compared with Table 1a, which shows the number of students enrolled in each of the languages offered at UM each year from the 2004-05 academic year through the 2012-13 academic year. Table 2 separates the participating students based on how long they had been studying a foreign language at UM.

Tables 3-5 present the information about the students’ motivations for studying a foreign language (a language other than English), first by dividing the students into integrative and instrumental motivational groups and then expanding upon each in more detail. Tables 6-9 show the percentages of students who say that they will continue studying their foreign language beyond the six hour requirement and those who say that they will not. Tables 7 and 9 show the reasons the responding students gave as to why they choose to continue language study or not.

Finally, Tables 9 and 10 show data about the students’ opinions regarding the foreign language requirement itself and alludes to the discussion of what students are gaining from their experience in the foreign language classroom at UM.
In this section, I will expand upon the data presented in the Results chapter and discuss them in detail. The goal of this discussion is to analyze the responses of the survey participants to discover the value of the lower-level language courses at UM, particularly from the perspective of the students, as well as to discuss the functionality of Liberal Arts Requirement of gaining six hours of credit at the 200 level or above. Additionally, the feelings from the students found in the survey responses will be compared with the expectations and goals for the lower-level language courses set by the Department of Modern Languages at UM. This section will start with basic information about the students, move on to motivation for enrolling in foreign language courses and desire to continue study of a foreign language, and end with a look at what the students gained from taking foreign language courses at the University of Mississippi.

To begin, it is important to note the number of responding students who took courses in each of the listed languages. When looking at Table 1a, it can be seen that the numbers obtained via the survey, seen in Table 1, provide an accurate representation of the students historically enrolled in each language. The most obvious observation is that Spanish, both in the survey and traditionally at UM, is the most popular language studied by students. The survey shows that 56% of students enrolled in Spanish courses and over the nine years of enrollment seen in Table 1a, with an average of 67% of students choosing to enroll in Spanish. Although the percentage varies from year to year, it is still clear that the most popular language to study among students at UM is Spanish.

This finding reveals much about the foreign language students within the Department of Modern Languages. The most obvious conclusion is that there are simply more students interested in the Spanish language than there are students interested in the
other languages offered. This interest could stem from the proximity of the United States to Spanish-speaking countries or from the ever growing number of Spanish speakers in and entering the U.S. (Lipski, 2008). Additionally, because the state of Mississippi is closer to a large number of Spanish-speaking countries than other states, the above two reasons may be intensified at the University of Mississippi.

Another explanation for the interest in Spanish may be that many students are taking foreign language courses solely for the purpose of completing the foreign language requirement and Spanish is perceived to be the easiest to learn. Dr. Donald L. Dyer, has been the chair of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Mississippi since 2005. When asked about the differences between the languages in the department and the tendencies of students to choose certain languages over others, he said that people have certain beliefs when it comes to “the complexity of languages.” Specifically for native speakers of English, he said:

“For English speakers, Spanish and French, and German and Portuguese and Italian, the Romance languages in general, the Germanic languages are, I don’t want to say easier to acquire, but they don’t take as long to acquire as something like a Slavic language, which is a notch up. And then Chinese, Arabic, and Korean are at the top of the scale; they take longer to acquire. Usually that’s because there’s something about their structure which is not familiar to the English speaker.”
This idea not only offers an explanation for the popularity of Spanish, but also for the popularity seen in the enrollment numbers of German, French, and Italian (Table 1a). French and German have historically been in the top four of most studied languages at UM. Italian was not always in the list of top four, but over the nine years, the program grew quickly and even surpassed German in enrolment in the 2012-13 academic year (Table 1a). These numbers support the statement made by Dr. Dyer.

Specifically in reference to Spanish being the most popular language among undergraduate students at UM, Dr. Dyer said, “It’s the most familiar thing people can find and a lot of people studied it in high school.” For the purposes of this study, data were not collected about which specific languages the students had studied before taking courses at UM; however, it was found that 94% of responders had previously studied a foreign language before they began their study at UM.

The numbers seen in this survey do not show exactly the same results as the Department of Modern Languages’ enrollment data. For example, Spanish was found to be the most popular language studied in both, yet languages such as Chinese and Arabic are found to be more popular in this study than they were found to be in the Department of Modern Languages’ results. However, there are many possible explanations for this variance, including personal desire to participate in activities outside of class or lack of motivation to provide feedback about language courses. Additionally, students taking Chinese and Arabic, both of which had more participants than any other language except French and Spanish, are likely to be studying those languages for reasons other than fulfilling a requirement (based on the findings of the current study that all students who mentioned program merit as their motivation to study a foreign language stated they
had/are studying Chinese and/or Arabic) and potentially have a more positive outlook on language learning, leading more of those students to respond to the foreign language survey.

Motivation

Motivation for studying a language as an undergraduate student and motivation to continue or end study after meeting the basic requirement of six hours at the 200-level or above is a major theme of this study. Students were asked a series of questions, which can be found in the Methods chapter of this study, two of which were:

(5) “Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?”

(15) “Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?”

Responses to these two questions ranged widely; however, they are strongly connected. The responses to question 5 (“Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?”) give insight into what motivated the students to enroll in language courses. Question 15 (“Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?”) allowed for expansion upon the previous question and allowed students to reflect on their experience in the classroom and decide if they would continue with the study of language. Additionally, evidence of integrative and instrumental motivation was found within the responses to these two questions. Instrumental and integrative motivations were found to have a strong effect on a student’s desire to continue language study past the requirement.
Instrumental Motivation

It is best to begin this discussion by examining the responses to question 5, “Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?” As defined in Chapter 2, instrumental motivation is inspired by extrinsic motivators. Having extrinsic motivation reveals the belief that a task, in this case language learning, will provide some type of reward. In contrast, integrative motivation is inspired intrinsically, and students are spurred on by this type of motivation because it brings them some type of internal fulfillment. After discussion of instrumental or integrative motivation to study a language, a connection will be made with the participants’ desires to continue studying beyond the basic requirement.

Table 3 shows that 66% of survey responders gave answers that displayed instrumental motivation to study a language. Table 4 breaks down the expressed instrumental motivations into five different categories. Four students mentioned wanting to learn a foreign language to enhance their experience abroad as their motivation for language study. Their reasons for enrollment were:

“They [language courses] interested me and make travel to foreign nations more possible.”

“I wanted to study abroad and know the language.”

“I want to live abroad.”

“To [be] able to communicate with family and friends abroad.”
These responses show that the students’ chosen foreign language will be a tool for them when communicating with people from another country and when visiting or living in a country where that language is spoken. The sample of students with this opinion was small, but it was a consistent one. All four students had very similar motivation, and all four of them said they would continue studying foreign language past the six-hour requirement. Each student either reiterated their reason for study in the first place or added that they wished to be fluent in their studied language.

The fifth row of Table 4 is made up of those students who specifically cited expanded career opportunities as their reason for studying a foreign language. This category of motivation is classified as instrumental because language learning would lead to more money or a better job, which is an external reward. This was the second largest group of students, only sitting behind those who enrolled in a foreign language to fulfill some type of requirement. These students, like those who wished to use their studied language abroad, said that they would continue their study of foreign language beyond the basic requirement. Three of the seven students that formed this group said that continued study would open up many more job and advancement opportunities once they joined the workforce. The remaining four all stated that they would continue on to complete a major or a minor in their chosen language.

The smallest categories of instrumental motivation are those in which students identified merit and high quality in the language study program and in which they would be able to use their language skills in order to gain achievement in other academic disciplines. Of the five students who saw merit and quality in their chosen language program, four are studying Chinese and the fifth is studying Arabic. Their confidence in
these programs shows that although they did not specify a particular goal for their language study, they know that studying under these programs will reward them in some way in the future. One student studying Russian stated that “[Russian is] necessary for research and my area of study.” Only one student out of these six, representing 17% of these students, said that he/she would not continue study, his/her reason being, “I have to commission” (referring to military service).

The decisions of this group of students when it comes to continued study is not in complete agreement. Continuation of study generally indicates a strong motivation or the result of a good experience in the classroom (Ketsman, 2012). The student in this group who chose to not continue study past the basic requirement, however, did not show any negative feelings toward language study or towards the courses that he/she took. Instead, his/her reason seemed to stem more from a prior obligation that put a time limit on foreign language study.

These four categories only make up 13% of instrumentally motivated students and all but one said that they would continue studying a foreign language. The choice to continue language study is important because it can explain a great deal about the students and their experiences learning a foreign language. None of the above-mentioned students displayed negative feelings about their specific language programs, which leads to the conclusion that they had good (or at least neutral) experiences in class. These conclusions suggest that instrumentally motivated students can be highly motivated to learn a language because a valuable personal reward is seen by each individual (Noles, Pelletier, Clément, and Vallerand, 2003).
The largest percentage of instrumentally motivated students, 87%, is comprised of students who fall under the category of, “Degree/major/program requirement,” the first row of Table 4, as their expressed form of instrumental motivation. Respondents gave reasons such as “Required,” “Required for degree,” “Required for graduation,” “Because I had to,” or “Forced to.” Other variations of these responses were also present, but they all expressed the same idea: that these students had little or no interest in studying language outside the need of doing so to earn their degrees.

The idea of fulfilling a requirement is the largest motivational factor found in this research, leading to the idea that a large portion of students enrolled in foreign language courses at UM attend only because, in order to graduate, they need to earn six credits of foreign language at or above the 200 level. Of these students, 82 are Spanish students, three are German students, six are French students, two students of each Italian, Portuguese, and Chinese students, four are Arabic students, one is a Korean student, three are Russian students, and nine have studied two languages or did not specify a language of study.

The responses seen above to the questions 5 (“Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?”) are very straightforward. In addition to being easy to understand, they help explain some of the reactions, particularly the negative ones, to question 15, “Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?” Of the 114 students who are only taking a foreign language because they “have to”, 43% (49 students) said that they would not continue studying after the basic requirement, 18% (21
students) said that they may continue, and 39% (44 students) said that they would continue language study.

The students who said that they would not continue language study past the basic requirement present an interesting point of discussion. Almost all of their responses were extremely negative toward the language learning process, the classroom experience itself, or evinced disdain for the basic language requirement. Six students simply answered “No” to this question; two others answered, “Absolutely not” and “Ha no. Not happening.” Five students said that they did not have time due to other courses that they needed to take or because they were graduating. Three students gave answers that did not fit into any category:

“No, I already know how to speak the language and would rather pursue other aspects of my interest.”

“No. I have a basic understanding and have no further plans to continue.”

“No. My scholarship came to an end.”

The first two responses indicate that the basic language courses have met their needs, so they see no reason to continue. This actually puts the basic courses in a positive light: when the students satisfied their needs, they concluded their studies without any grief or sorrow that they had not learned enough. The final response about the scholarship does not give any insight into the student’s experience in the foreign language classroom; however, this student could have decided to continue studying language if his/her scholarship had allowed.
The above responses are not necessarily negative; they simply show that there are students who do not have a passion, whether positive or negative, about language learning. The remaining students, however, expressed a great deal of negative feelings when asked if they would continue studying a foreign language beyond the basic requirement. To begin, nine students stated that continuing foreign language study would not aid them in their major/degree path or in the desired career. Their responses included the following:

“No because I have so many other courses to take.”

“No. It was a valuable experience but I do not need to know a foreign language for my future job.”

“No. I'm trying to graduate and I have enough classes to keep me busy without me trying to do things for "fun.""

“No! It's not necessary to my major so I would rather focus on different material.”

“No, learning another language in order to obtain a degree in Biology is not only unneeded, it often seems like another way to harbor more money at the expense of the students.”

These students express that they have time and monetary constraints that outweigh the benefits of language learning.

As noted in Chapter 2, studies have shown that language learning holds many benefits (e.g. Gallagher-Brett 2004, Robinson-Stuart & Nocon 1996, Byram 2002, Byram 1997). Students have the opportunity to gain other skills in addition to bilingual abilities,
and it seems that these students are either unaware of these benefits or refuse to accept them. Dr. Dyer spoke about the benefits outside the obvious benefit of learning to speak a second language:

“I think most language educators would tell you that studying a foreign language brings with it a kind of cultural understanding of other peoples that you don’t necessarily get. You know with the language come the people who speak it, with the language often comes study abroad, interactions with people from different countries, you develop a cultural appreciation, step outside yourself and see what other people are like. Beyond that, there are still other things, some of us who have been in the profession for a long time feel very strongly that language learning is a kind of learning that brings together all kinds of different cognitive skills, so it’s a real brain builder. So it’s not just learning how to memorize things, it’s not just learning how to problem solve, but it’s both of those things and then its applying your skills in an engaged way to problem solve.”

Other students did not have a good classroom experience. One student in particular articulated very clearly how foreign language learning made him/her feel. In response to the question 15 (“Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?”) the student stated:
“No, because I hate feeling like I am not good enough for something, and feeling as though I am pathetic. Not to mention my self-esteem and feeling of accomplishment just hit the floor every day whenever I walk out of that class. It has called me severe emotional turmoil and scaring, because every day I want to cry because I hate it so much.”

Although this student was the only one to express these feelings, it is important to address them. These feelings may be held by more students studying a foreign language at UM or even by more students who participated in this survey who did not articulate their feelings as clearly. As previously discussed, motivation is an important aspect of language learning and an extension is a student’s confidence and self-esteem. This student directly addressed these topics in his/her response. Based on this student’s reaction to the idea of continuing their foreign language study and the information presented by Dörnyei (1994), this student may not be willing to study foreign language not because he/she cannot fit it into a schedule, but rather because s/he thinks that s/he cannot learn a foreign language (Dörnyei and Skenan, 2003).

Additionally, this issue may be more than the students having a difficult time with the material, meaning that their hardship may come from the class setup, their interactions with the professor (Awad, 2014), or a number of other situations. Some students who may have similar feelings as the student mentioned above responded to the same question with negative feelings specifically about the classroom experience.

“No. The classes offered at the University of Mississippi cannot expand my conversational or writing skills.”
“No. These classes are extremely difficult and I find it hard to work with the faculty since there is very little wiggle room with the syllabus and they do not stray from the syllabus.”

“No. Don't approve/agree with their teaching methods.”

Lightbrown and Spada (2006) commented on the phenomenon of learner beliefs and their effects on learning. These effects arise from the disconnect between how the instructor, or the department, decides to teach and how the learner believes they learn best. This phenomenon is particularly strong in adult learners because, many times, older learners will enter the language classroom with assumptions on how the course should be taught to meet their needs on an individual level. Disappointment arises when the two view do not match.

At UM, the Department of Modern Languages uses a communicative approach to language instruction. Some key elements to this approach are:

1. Modified input to allow for student comprehension

2. Limited error correction from the instructor and from other students. Clarification is the preferred form of feedback.

3. Time is spent in groups to maximize student-student interaction. However, because students are usually not native speakers, there may be many errors.

4. Use of materials produced in the target language to provide more opportunity for discourse

(Lightbrown and Spada, 2006)
This form of language instruction is heavily based on comprehension and there is generally not a high focus on production with a low error rate. When considering the above student responses within the framework of this teaching model, it could be gathered that is the teaching method they do not agree with.

The most passionate, and the largest, group of students who chose not to continue their language study are those who see no importance to language learning, no need for it, and who believe that learning a foreign language is a waste of time. Some students from this group simply answered the question about continued study with “no, not necessary”, while other students had much more powerful responses, some of which include:

“No. Why would anyone torture themselves more than necessary.”

“No, I don't think it's all that important and it could take up time I could be learning something more relative to my future”

“Absolutely not. I feel like it is a waste of time if you do not intend to use it in the future. I could agree with a basic knowledge of Spanish but requiring more than 100 level [classes] is pointless for those of us who don't plan on using it in the future.”

“No, we are past the threshold for learning foreign languages to a useful degree. It would literally be a waste of time”

“No. I actually changed my major because of the irrelevant foreign language requirements. English is spoken in America. No need for me to learn a different language.’
“Not a chance. There is no need for it. I speak English, and the
language for the country in which I live is English. As long as I can
speak in English and live in the United States there is no need to know
another language.”

These responses are particularly powerful because they show that some students,
even after spending time in the foreign language classroom have not gained enough
speaking skills to decide that they should continue, have not gained an appreciation for
other languages, and may have left the foreign language classroom with a negative view
of people who speak a language besides English.

These feelings of negativity toward languages, and potentially speakers of
languages, other than English in the U.S. are not new. After WWI, a high level of
xenophobia was present in America and because of this, foreign language programs were
cut. People who spoke languages other than English were not allowed to do so and
immigrants who could not speak English were not admitted into the United States. After
WWII and the Korean War, however, things changed. During the wars, Americans had to
interact and communicate with people from all over the world that spoke different
languages. The government saw the value of language education after these challenging
times and language programs were restarted (Panetta, 1999).

The English-Only Movement in the U.S. may also be feeding the dislike toward
language learning that these students expressed. English has always been the perceived
“official language” of the U.S. even though the country has never had one. Additionally,
English has always been a symbol of status and power, so it is not surprising that many
students may carry similar beliefs (Pac, 2012).
All of the above motivations to study language are classified as instrumental motivations. Standing on its own, the question, “Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?” does not provide much information about the students beyond getting an idea for the type of student who is enrolled in the lower-level language courses. However, when the responses to that question are compared with those students’ responses to “Will you continue your foreign language study at the University of Mississippi beyond the requirement for your degree? Why or Why not?”, some very interesting insights about the students can be found. Based on the response above, it can be seen that instrumental motivation can inspire students to continue language study. This is evident in the students whose instrumental motivation is to enhance their experience abroad, to expand career opportunities, to gain a good education through a strong program, and those who wish to use language as a tool in other academic endeavors. Outside those motivations, however, those with instrumental motivation who choose not to continue study have strong opinions about why they will not continue study.

These results suggest a relationship correlation between instrumental motivations and students ending their study of foreign languages. However, it cannot be said that instrumental motivation always leads to students discontinuing their language study. Of the students who were taking a foreign language “because they had to”, 18% said they may continue foreign language study and 39% said they would continue language study. So, although there is a strong correlation between instrumental motivation and ending study, there is also strong evidence of a relationship between instrumental motivation and continued study. For example, some of these students said:

“Yes, want to be proficient in 2 other languages.”
“Yes, it is interesting to me.”

“Yes because I want to perfect Arabic.”

“Yes because I enjoy the classes.”

The students who are not sure if they will continue mainly cited potentially not having enough time in their schedules as the reason why they could not commit to more language study at this time.

The stark contrast of opinions about continued study from students who all started learning a language for generally the same reason is very interesting but also promising for the success of the foreign language courses. Although students have negative feelings toward language learning and their experiences, more students leave their courses with a positive impression about language learning and everything that comes with it.

For some of the students described in this section, instrumental motivation was a positive force. These students were ready to take on the task of language learning and see it through to some personal goal. For others, however, instrumental motivation did not encourage students to enjoy language learning. Some students from this group were neutral about learning or just wanted to move on from the experience while others were much more opposed. The group of students so strongly opposed to taking foreign language courses all had very negative opinions about the requirement to study a second language. This conclusion suggests that their feelings surrounding the foreign language requirement may have made it difficult for these students to invest in the task and led them to only see the negative aspects of the experience.
Integrative Motivation

In addition to the instrumental motivations found within the responses, 23% of students declared a form of integrative motivation as their reason for studying a foreign language, and 11% stated a mixture of integrative and instrumental motivation (meaning the students are fulfilling a requirement of some sort or see a usefulness to language learning and also enjoy it and/or want to be fluent).

The conversation about integrative motivation is much simpler one because only three categories of integrative motivation were found; and of the 46 students with integrative motivation, six said that they may continue language study, only one said that he/she would not continue language study, while the other 39 students all said that they would continue language study beyond the basic requirement.

The categories for integrative motivation to study a foreign language in the parameters of this study are (1) earning a major or minor in a foreign language, (2) wanting to learn more about a culture associate with a certain language, and (3) enjoying learning a language. As Dörnyei (1994) says, integrative motivation is present when a person performs a certain task because it will result in personal joy or satisfaction. Based on this definition, the desire to lean about a culture and enjoying language learning easily fit into this category. Earning a minor or major in a foreign language may seem to be an instrumental form of motivation based on the previous discussion; however, when the data collected in this study about respondents earning a major or minor is looked at holistically, the general trend of these students was that they had an underlying interest in language learning. Students earning a major or minor in a foreign language will
obviously earn an extrinsic reward in the form of a degree, if they complete all of their course work, however they have chosen to spend a majority of or a large portion of their time in college immersed within their target language and culture.

Most of the respondents with integrative motivation replied simply to question 5 “Why did you enroll in foreign language courses at UM?” The following, however, were more expressive in their responses.

“Learning a second language is such an important skill nowadays, and I wanted to continue learning Spanish, so that I can eventually be completely fluent. I am also interested in obtaining either a minor or a major in Spanish.”

“Because I was interested in learning another language other than English.”

“To fulfill the foreign language requirements in my major accompanied by my desire to study the language, culture, and way of life of another people.”

“To learn about a language and culture I am interested in.”

These students not only showed that they liked language learning, but they also saw one or more of the benefits of foreign language study. This correlation between integrative motivation along with intrinsic interest and ability to see the benefits of language learning suggest that these students entered their language study at UM with these ideas, they were given to them after spending time in
the foreign language classroom, or these ideas were fostered throughout their education.

Although students with instrumental motivation had a good record when it came to continued study, there was a significantly higher percentage of students inspired by integrative motivation who showed interest in continuing their foreign language study (85% of integratively motivated students responded that they would continue language study beyond the basic requirement compared to only 40% of instrumentally motivated respondents saying the same). This high probability does not necessarily mean that integrative motivation is always better or more powerful than instrumental motivation, but it may suggest that integrative motivation is more consistent than the alternative (Noels et. al., 2003). With the overwhelming majority of the students in this survey wanting to continue their study of foreign language beyond the basic requirement, students with an intrinsic desire are also willing to endure the long and usually difficult process of acquiring a foreign language for personal gain that may not result in social, economic or professional reward.

The discussion about different types of motivation and their relation to continuation of study is important because language learning is a long process (Collier, 1989). Understanding why students are enrolling in foreign language and their feelings toward learning more could potentially lead to better execution of courses and to more students continuing to study foreign languages beyond the required amount because motivation is a critical component while learning a new language (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003). However, looking in more detail into the student experience within the basic
language courses and with the general language requirement can also reveal much about its successes and shortcomings from the student perspective.

The Foreign Language Requirement

As stated in the Results chapter, 55% of students had knowledge of the Liberal Arts foreign language requirement, while 45% did not. In the survey, students were also asked what they believed the purpose of the language requirement to be (question 11), with the hope that it would provide insight about the students’ perceptions of the requirement and language courses in general. These results can be found in Table 10. An overwhelming 80% of students responded positively to this question, with responses related to broadening students’ horizons, preparing students for a globalized world, creating well rounded students, and teaching language skills. Responses ranged from:

“To provide students with a well-rounded education (which involves learning to communicate with other people who do not look, think, or speak the same way you do!)”

“To become more familiar with another language, because in 2016 you need to know more than just English.”

to

“Awareness of other languages and marketability when looking for a job.”

and

“Gain a fuller education in a liberal arts environment.”
About the purpose of the foreign language requirement at UM, Dr. Dyer said, “Like many universities, our university has a foreign language expectation in the College of Liberal Art as part of a set of core courses that the university believes are important for students to study… Here [UM] the administration has a well-balanced appreciation for liberal arts disciplines including foreign language study.” He talked about the culture understanding and appreciation that should come with language learning as well as interacting with the people speaking a certain language. Dyer said that students can gain the ability to “step outside” themselves and “see what other people are like.”

Of the remaining 20% of students, 11% said they did not know why students are required to study a foreign language. Examining this group of students is important because not understanding why the university believes foreign language is important for students may lead them to develop a negative opinion about language learning when it is difficult or, as with many students who have presented neutral answers in this study, run out of time to take courses outside of their major courses.

The final 9% of students were categorized into a group of those who “gave [a] negative response about the requirement.” This is a very broad grouping; however, the variable responses all expressed negative feelings toward foreign language learning. A sample of the types of response to question 11, (“What do you believe is the purpose of the 6 hour foreign language requirement?”) are:

“To make students rethink their college career and drop out of college.”
“So the university can make it nearly impossible to complete college in 4 years and get more money”

“To torture individuals”

“I don't care because it's completely ridiculous”

Outside of the more passionate responses, the remaining were more mild but still gave negative opinions about their language learning experiences. There are many possible reasons why this small percentage of students is so opposed to the foreign language requirement. In this case, a large responsibility in changing this mindset falls to the instructor (Awad 2014, and Lightbrown and Spada 2006). Instructors have a lot of influence over student attitude and therefore have the potential to transform a negative student into a more positive one. Unfortunately, no questions were asked specifically about instructors to verify this idea.

Another possible explanation for this attitude could be that it develops over time as the courses become difficult or when some students realize that they are not quickly gaining the language skills that they believed that they would by a certain point, which can be very discouraging (Collier, 1989). Regarding the task of language learning, Dr. Dyer said:

“Foreign language tends to be one of the two most disliked disciplines among university students, the other being math. And the reason why that is, I’m convinced, after a long time, is because these are things that require practice and problem solving skills to be successful. Nowadays, most people just want to be able to do
something and be done with it. Finish it and be done with it, memorize it and be done with it; but something which requires years, in fact, to perfect is daunting. And foreign language is daunting…”

**Language Preparation**

In the survey, students were also asked “Have your 100- and 200-level classes prepared you to speak the language you are learning?” To this question 70% answered YES and only 30% responded NO. Based on this, obviously a majority of students feel prepared to speak the language that they are studying.

In order to evaluate the students’ confidence in their speaking ability and to further examine the success of the basic foreign language course and the basic requirement, students were also asked if they would feel comfortable studying abroad after being instructed in 100 and 200 level courses. This is an important evaluation because, as stated above, competence in language is one of the goals of the language requirement and those basic language courses. The majority of students said that they would be willing to study abroad after taking the basic courses; however, a majority of those who would feel comfortable are studying languages besides Spanish. Of those studying Spanish, nearly a 50/50 split occurs between students feeling comfortable (51%) and those not feeling comfortable (49%).

One important aspect of these responses is that many students, especially those studying Spanish, mentioned that they felt like they could read and write the language that they are learning but do not feel as if they could carry on a
conversation with a native speaker. This is an interesting phenomenon because clearly the students are learning something, but not in a way that they feel that they are learning to speak a new language well. Based on the information provided from Gass and Selinker (1994) regarding student evaluation seen in Chapter 2, these students may perform well in class, but realize that is where their success ends.

This chapter has gone into detailed discussion about the student responses and some of their potential implication. It was seen that the student sample used for this survey is well balanced and can serve as a representative for the student body. Motivation was discussed and it was seen that many more students are instrumentally motivated than integratively motivated and that integrative motivation generally leads to a students with a more positive outlook on the language learning experience. Finally, it was seen that most students understand why they are required to take lower-level language courses, however some students could not identify any reason at all as to why they are expected to complete those courses. In the following section, the conclusions drawn in this chapter will be applied to the successes and failures of the lower-level foreign language courses at UM. Additionally, helpful changes, along with changes already in progress, within the Department of Modern Languages will be discussed.
Conclusion

The previous section went into detail discussing the results of this study and gave a few thoughts about what those results suggest about the students enrolled in the lower-level foreign language courses at UM and about the courses themselves: (1) that the largest group of students study Spanish; (2) instrumental motivation is the most common form of motivation for students at UM; and (3) the majority of students (80%) showed positive reasoning as to why foreign language is required, however many of the students that did not react positively were strongly opposed to the idea of a language requirement. This section will take the previous information in order to discuss the effectiveness of the lower-level language courses, specifically from the student perspective.

The biggest topic discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the topic leading to some of the biggest discussions, is the comparison of students who identified instrumental motivation versus those who identified integrative motivation for studying a foreign language and their probability of continuing language study. As seen in the Instrumental Motivation and Integrative Motivation sections of the Discussion chapter, integrative motivation led to more students choosing to continue language study, and
those students had a generally positive outlook. Due to their positive attitude when beginning their study at UM and their generally positive outlook at the time of the survey, it can be assumed that the courses that they took did not discourage them or cause them to form negative opinions about language learning. The integratively motivated students are fairly simple to evaluate here because their views are all very similar: they enjoyed their classes and found value in their studies, and seemed genuinely interested in language learning.

Students who expressed instrumental motivation, however, were a much more complicated group to evaluate, and their responses revealed more about the success and failures of the lower-level language courses. Of the participants, 66% identified instrumental motivation as their reason for enrolling, and 87% of these students are only enrolled in language courses because they are required to do so. From this population of students many conclusions can be drawn about the success of the lower-level courses.

Success can be seen through the students who entered the language class room only because someone told them that they needed the courses, but decided that they would like to continue language study. Students who expressed this opinion of the language classroom suggested that students can go into the classroom and learn something of value. A similar phenomenon was seen with those students who stated that
they did not know if they would continue language study. Students with a neutral opinion
do not necessarily signal failure, but it does suggest that at least the language courses are
not inspiring feelings of disdain in students who do not enter language study with a
positive outlook on language learning.

One of the most interesting groups of students found in this study were those who
enrolled in language courses because they were required to do so and throughout their
time in the language classroom found nothing useful in the language learning experience,
said they would not continue language study beyond the requirement, and saw no positive
reason for studying a foreign language. This is an unfortunate opinion because, as noted
throughout the literature on second language acquisition, there are many documented
benefits to foreign language study. Reaching out to these students and encouraging them
to see the benefits of learning a foreign language may inspire them to continue past the
basic requirement, or at the very least improve their experience by helping them
understand why they must take required courses.

Another interesting discussion that these students introduced was that they saw no
purpose to the language requirement and, by extension, the lower-level courses. Dr. Dyer
spoke on some of the main goals of the lower-level courses for students:
“So one big goal obviously is to develop a kind of communicative competence in the students that matters, that has some significance… but there’s more than that. I think most language educators would tell you that studying a foreign language brings with it a kind of cultural understanding of other peoples that you don’t necessarily get.”

These goals were seemingly not accomplished when it came to this one group of unhappy students. Although the majority of students did not share their opinions, this vocal minority seemed not to want to learn anything and left their experiences in language study with a negative opinion of language learning.

Some responses that were particularly troubling are those in which students stated that the requirement was unnecessary because they live in America and English is spoken in America. If a level of cultural competence is a goal of the lower-level courses, then they failed to instill a meaningful level of this competence in these students. This result may have been caused by a number of problems, some of which may have occurred outside the classroom or before these obstinate students started language study. However, it appears that nothing in the classroom influenced these students enough to change their perspectives.
As mentioned earlier, language education in the U.S. has not been consistent over the years on a national stage. People in the English Only Movement believe that English should be the language spoken in America, and other languages should not be taught or tolerated. However, English is not an accurate representation of all the American people because the U.S. is comprised of many different people who speak many languages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

An important discussion should be had with all students about the importance of language diversity in the United States and the benefits (both cognitive, social, and economic) of understanding how other people function around the world, centering on the idea that the world today is connected in a way that it has never been before.

Successes and failures can be discussed to end endless degree; however, none of those discussions will have any significance unless the discussions lead to self-evaluation and change. According to Dr. Dyer, the Department of Modern Languages is currently undergoing some serious alterations. Dyer said,

“The first year consisted of two-, three-hour chunks and then the second year was the same thing. The old thinking was that this would give you the equivalent of two years of study. Now, that’s been changing and evolving more recently so many of our classes now are offered in five-
and six-hour chunks. And so the language requirement doesn’t fit so
nicely for some of those languages, like Chinese and Arabic. If you say
for example that you have to take six hours at the 200 or above, and your
two primary second-level courses, or 200-level courses, are both six
hours, then it doesn’t fit very well anymore. But that’s more what’s
happening there, that mismatch is more connected to the evolution of the
department in terms of contact hours.”

At this time, lower-level Spanish courses are undergoing the greatest change.
Currently and in the past, Spanish students would take two three-hour courses at the 100
level and then two three-hour courses at the 200 level. The change that will be
implemented in the fall of 2016 will require students to take a single six-hour course at
the 100 level and a single six-hour course at the 200 level to complete the language
requirement. This main goal for this change is that students will receive more contact
over a shorter period of time and, hopefully, increase their progress.

Students have some opinions about how the lower-level courses could be
improved as well:

“Less group work; group work is something that extroverts benefit from,
but introverts like me SUFFER. I just get uncomfortable and opt not to do
my work because of shyness. It's not your fault-- the modern theories of education and workplace structuring are constructed to benefit the extroverts, but it sucks.”

” Not going to fast”

“More speaking activities and more teacher student interaction”

“…it seems like the large number of students who aren't willing to put forth the effort detract from the classroom experience of both the instructors and students that do want to practice.”

“My experience could have improved if I had a language partner/friend that I could casually converse with in Chinese.”

These responses are only a few of the many suggestions that students had about their experiences in lower-level language courses. These changes suggested by student are likely not simple or quick ones, yet they are important to acknowledge because these courses are required, in order to benefit the students. The students who responded to this survey are the students being directly affected by these courses, so their feedback comes from firsthand experience and can be very powerful.
Although there are many successful elements in this study, there are some difficulties that arose. First, different languages at UM are taught and approached differently. These differences could affect student progress within a single course and create discrepancies when they are evaluated. For example, a student of Chinese and a student of Spanish may progress to different levels during their first language course. This difference could affect how he/she evaluates that course. Additionally, earning a minor in a language could be categorized as a form of instrumental motivation rather than an integrative form of motivation. In a future study, this could be avoided by asking students why they wish to earn a minor, or even a major, in a foreign language. Finally, because Spanish students made up an overwhelming majority of responders, the results of this study may tend to be more representative of those students and the instruction of Spanish at UM. If each language offered at UM was evaluated separately, the results may be slightly different than those found in this study.

This study allowed for a small evaluation of language courses at UM; however, there are ways in which it could be expanded. First, more information could have been collected from the students, for example, obtaining student grades from certain classes and comparing them with how the student feel about the course, which could provide another set of interesting conclusions. Additionally, a similar study could be conducted after the change in the Spanish courses is implemented. Spanish students were the largest
group of responders and are the largest group of language students at the University of Mississippi, so reevaluating student opinion after this change could reveal a different collective student perspective.

In the end, this investigation indicated that most students see or find value in the lower-level language courses at UM; however there is a small, and very vocal, portion of students that chose not to accept the messages provided to them by their language courses.
List of References


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