

## A Working Paper from the Global Comprehension Working Group

### **Introduction**

A truly liberal education is one that frees us from the limits of our particular culture and historical period. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this freedom requires that we develop a global understanding of the ways that our own diverse cultural, political, and historical perceptions and appreciations of the world articulate with those of other peoples in other places. One of the traditional avenues through which education has pursued this goal has been through the study of foreign cultures and languages. The Global Comprehension Working Group (GCWG) has come to believe that such components of a liberal education will become increasingly urgent for a variety of reasons apparent to anyone who has paid attention to world events in recent years. This urgency has been sensed at colleges and universities throughout the United States for some time, where committees like the GCWG have been charged with examining the ways in which campuses might become further 'internationalized.' Most notably, Harvard's recent curricular review has responded to this sense of urgency by recommending, among other things, that "[e]very Harvard College student should be expected to complete an international experience, defined as study, research, or work abroad, and – no matter their level of proficiency upon entering Harvard – to continue study in a foreign language" (p. 1). The GCWG takes these proposals, and those of analogous committees at other institutions, as a strong indication that American educators are deeply and appropriately concerned that many students are not acquiring the in-depth understanding of cultures, languages, and global issues that they will need to negotiate an increasingly interdependent world. The various reports have addressed these concerns by identifying academic, social, and instrumental (or professional) goals to be achieved by any educational institution in an age of global interdependence. Below we summarize briefly each goal in turn.

Meeting academic goals in an age of global interdependence means that students must be prepared to understand different modes of inquiry, to tolerate ambiguity, and to take multiple perspectives. As Jane Edwards, principal architect of Harvard's commitment to internationalization, put it during a symposium sponsored by the GCWG, students must be able to see the world through the eyes of others, including seeing themselves as others see them. This seems to us to be entirely consistent with the self-knowledge

that liberal education has always sought, but with an outward looking emphasis: an awareness of differences in perspective is necessary in a world in which effective cross-cultural communication has become vital.

Meeting social goals means that students must be encouraged to become good citizens both at home and abroad. At home, students with the self-knowledge derived from seeing themselves as others see them will be more likely to embrace the values of cooperation and tolerance that are crucial in an increasingly multicultural United States. Abroad, students with this self-knowledge will become more sensitized and informed international citizens, as they will be able to situate their own interests in relation to those of people sometimes very different from themselves.

Meeting instrumental or professional goals means that students must obtain the skills and knowledge that will make them productive and successful within a progressively more internationalized economy. As Geoffrey Bannister, former President of Butler University and President of the Forum on Education Abroad, pointed out during the GCWG's symposium, not only will career success require an understanding of the procedures, objectives, and strategies of colleagues and competitors from abroad, but it will also require an ability to work with colleagues from a wide variety of cultures on collaborative projects.<sup>1</sup> Professionals from different countries will have to work together in solving global problems.

Accepting these academic, social, and instrumental goals of internationalizing education and reflecting on the experience of others addressing these goals, the GCWG thinks Amherst should commit itself to a number of initiatives:

- 1) To provide more institutional support for students to engage in overseas (taken to mean, out-of-the-country) learning, including studying abroad, working abroad, interning abroad, or volunteering abroad;**
- 2) To encourage -- perhaps with new F.T.E.'s -- the development of integrated programs in the interdisciplinary study of global issues;**

---

<sup>1</sup> By Bannister's account, law schools are increasingly interested in students with international experience, since much litigation is international in scope. Moreover, medical schools are beginning to follow suit, since in an interconnected world, disease knows no boundaries.

- 3) **To increase modestly the number and diversity of international students on the Amherst College campus;**
- 4) **To assist students to study or work abroad outside of the academic year;**
- 5) **To support faculty who wish opportunities to enhance their own global competencies through language-learning and/or closer scholarly engagement with international colleagues.**

Below we elaborate upon each initiative in turn.

**Initiative 1: To provide more institutional support for students, encouraging them to engage in overseas learning, including studying, working, interning, and volunteering abroad.**

The GCWG believes that Amherst should encourage more students to seek educational opportunities abroad -- understood here very broadly to include degree studies, internships, volunteer activities, and other work experiences undertaken overseas. On average, nearly 40% of Amherst students now study abroad for at least one semester and, sometimes, for a full academic year. Considered from a national standpoint, this number is respectable. But Amherst College is far from being a leader in this area among its peers.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> We include a rough comparison below, although we want to emphasize that Amherst should be concerned not only with the number of students it sends abroad, but also with the quality of the educational experiences that they have while abroad.

Lewis & Clark C	84.8%
Carleton College	81.1%
Colby College	79.5%
Colorado College	70.6%
Dartmouth College	61.5%
Macalester College	60%
Middlebury College	60%
Pomona College	50%
Wesleyan Univ.	49%
Williams College	45%
<u>Amherst College</u>	<u>36% (of class of '04)</u>
Swarthmore College	30%
Yale University	10%

Overwhelmingly, overseas study is seen by students as an engaging and positive educational experience, something which enriches and diversifies their degree studies. At its best, study abroad exposes students to cultural, linguistic, social, and physical 'difference.' This exposure, say students, makes them more tolerant and empathetic, more open to different perspectives and behaviors. Many faculty, whether or not they themselves have had this experience, agree, seeing in returned students not only new knowledge, but enhanced intellectual and personal maturity and confidence. The impact of this overseas living and learning experience is often demonstrated in the increased quality of student performance in course work and senior thesis research. The percentage of senior honors and prizes going to students who have had a study abroad experience is impressive.

Moreover, we see the enhancement and expansion of the College's learning abroad opportunities as the best way to increase the foreign language competence of all students.<sup>3</sup> For those who go to a country where English is not the dominant language, learning abroad allows for the accelerated acquisition of foreign language skills that are the most difficult to teach in a classroom -- particularly oral and listening comprehension skills. And, more generally, learning to speak other languages competently opens the door to genuine inter-cultural communication: one is more compelled to take other people seriously when engaging them on their terms, including speaking the languages they are most comfortable with.

Study abroad at its best promotes a dynamic synthesis of academic and experiential learning modes. It needs to be seen primarily as a way of enriching and diversifying campus study -- of offering educational opportunities that are not available at home in a cross-cultural milieu that confronts students with 'difference.' This cross-cultural immersion and exposure, part of the general broadening and maturing process of personal

---

<sup>3</sup>By our reckoning, approximately 42% of the class of 2004 never achieved foreign language competence above the level that could be acquired in a strong high school program. (See Appendix.) This is to be regretted. Yet, the solution is not the imposition of general breadth requirements, including foreign language requirements. In fact, the effects of commonplace requirements on the aggregate foreign language competency of each graduating class would be, perhaps paradoxically, negative. The GCWG deems it best to heed the lessons of the "Kennedy Curriculum," which indicate that general breadth requirements would cause a dramatic drop in the numbers of students who achieve advanced foreign language competency. (See Appendix.) Instead of requirements, the GCWG believes in providing students with positive incentives to undertake foreign language study by offering them enhanced and expanded opportunities to study, work, intern, and volunteer overseas, especially in those areas of the world that are currently the least often studied and visited.

and intellectual development, requires living and learning on terms different from those found in a domestic campus environment. An overseas living and learning sojourn can provide students with the invaluable (and inevitably self-reflexive) experience of being the 'outsider,' the 'foreigner,' the 'alien.' This experience can teach, in turn, cultural sensitivity, toleration, and empathy. Study abroad is thus a powerful means of alerting students to the poly-cultural heterogeneity of modern society at home and abroad and to prepare them for their place in the every-more-interdependent world in which they will live their lives and earn their livings.

Given the proven pedagogical value of education abroad, the GCWG would like to propose the following enhancements to Amherst's approach to study abroad:

### Faculty Oversight

There is at present no direct and ongoing faculty oversight of study-abroad advising or program selection. Institutional criteria by which new programs are approved or rejected do not exist. Nor is there an official body vested with the authority to draw up such criteria. Furthermore, there is no regular procedure through which approved programs can be re-certified over time. Until now, these issues have been addressed only on an ad hoc basis by the Study-Abroad Advisor and by the Registrar who regularly solicit input from faculty about, for example, whether particular courses offered by an approved program should be counted for College credit. (Whether courses taken abroad should, in addition, count toward a 'major' has been and should always be a matter for individual departments and programs.)

Thus, although there is sporadic faculty input concerning specific programs and courses, there is no general faculty input into study-abroad policy. The lack of an official faculty committee authorized to shape policies and procedures and to approve programs leads to unnecessary frustrations for students, faculty, and administrators. Although we are loathe to create more committee work, we advocate the creation of a permanent Committee on Study Abroad with the authority to evaluate and monitor the quality of the programs to which we send our students.

As mentioned, nearly 40% of Amherst students now study abroad for at least one semester and, sometimes, for a full academic year. We believe

that it is a Faculty responsibility to ensure that overseas academic courses meet academic standards that warrant credit at Amherst College. In addition, we believe that adequate campus and program support systems need to be in place so as to prepare students for living and learning abroad in a cross-cultural environment. Finally, the College needs to assure itself that such student needs as housing, health care, safety, and security are appropriately present in overseas programs.

*The GCWG, therefore, recommends that Amherst College should set up a Committee on Overseas Learning.* The Committee should consist of three members of the faculty (each from a different department), one of whom would serve as 'Chair,' the Study-Abroad Advisor, and the Registrar. Faculty terms would be for two years and staggered. Its responsibilities could include:

- a) Making recommendations to the Faculty on policies concerning student participation in overseas study;
- b) Selecting, reviewing, and evaluating all study-abroad programs and foreign institutions from which the College will accept transfer credit;
- c) Developing such guidelines for the 'Approved Study-Abroad List' as are necessary for maintaining the academic standards of the College;
- d) Examining and approving petitions from students seeking to be allowed to participate in programs not currently on the approved list.

*Moreover, the GCWG recommends that the title of Study-Abroad Advisor be changed to Director of Overseas Learning and the position, increased from half-time to full-time.* This would reflect the fact that much of the additional oversight of international education called for here (and additional responsibilities that could arise from proposals discussed below) will add considerably to the description of the position.

### Campus Advising

Informing students who wish to study abroad precisely how to fit this into their four-year degree studies is crucial to helping them make good decisions. There is, first, the question of timing: what is the optimum time

and duration for each student? Second, students need to know more about whether to think of study abroad as something that they should do for credit toward their general graduation requirements, or as something to enrich and diversify their academic major. If the latter, they need to understand what their department recommends as the best way to integrate an overseas sojourn into the rest of their studies.

Both Amherst College faculty and students report that curricular requirements now make study abroad difficult for students majoring in certain subjects—especially those in the physical sciences and those doing pre-medical studies. On the other hand, some faculty teaching in these areas report that it is desirable for their students to have an overseas living and learning experience before they enter the global workplace. Some faculty members in the social sciences express the same sentiments for students heading into international careers -- especially those in business. Many speak convincingly about the international dimensions of their own educations and careers.

*The GCWG recommends that every academic department and program should advise its potential and declared majors how they can study or work abroad and also satisfy all major requirements so as to graduate on time. This counsel should appear in the Amherst College Catalogue (and on departmental Web-pages) along with all other academic information; this would provide guidance not now readily available in all departments. Particular programs that work especially well for majors might be mentioned, as well as the optimum timing and duration of the study. The Director of Overseas Learning should work with academic departments whose students have traditionally found it difficult to study abroad, to identify programs and foreign institutions that offer course work that articulates well with course work in these departments.*

### Orientation and Re-entry

Students participating in learning abroad frequently remark in the evaluations they submit to the College both that they needed to be better prepared for what they would encounter abroad and that this experience should have been followed-up by additional intellectual and emotional processing. It is one thing to experience 'difference' and yet quite another to have the thinking tools necessary to comprehend and analyze it. The justification, at least in part, for study abroad at its best is that it provides a synthesis of academic and experiential modes of learning. The challenge

that this encounter with 'difference' represents is not now being formally addressed within the programs themselves, or on campus, before or after study abroad.

*The GCWG, therefore, recommends that Amherst should offer an expanded general pre-departure orientation for all students embarking on study abroad programs. It should also offer counsel to students heading overseas for internships, research projects, and other non-credit ventures. In addition, it should create a series of re-entry events for all students returning from such overseas sojourns.*

### Work Abroad and Internships

The arguments for working or for volunteering overseas are many -- and there are students who would benefit from participation in a non-academic, experiential overseas program, whether for credit, or not. It is currently unclear just how many Amherst College students are now working, as opposed to studying, overseas. Although the Career Center annually endeavors to collect data, few records are kept on such non-credit-bearing experiences.

Nationally, more and more students heading overseas to study are choosing programs that have built-in internship options. For instance, Boston University programs attract students from all over the United States primarily because of this opportunity for practical training. Many observers of study abroad claim that the workplace experience is more valuable than the type of study abroad program in which students are isolated in an Americanized classroom setting.

Internships can be engaged in prior to, concurrently with, or following a study abroad program (and need not be given academic credit). They can also be offered quite separately from such a study program. Working with Amherst College alumnae now living and working in foreign countries to set up and host internships is something now undertaken by the Career Center, but these efforts need to be expanded and intensified.

*The GCWG, therefore, recommends that institution-wide promotion and oversight of internships, volunteer service, and other forms of overseas education and training should be further supported by Amherst College. This institutional promotion and support should remain responsibility of the Career Center, working in conjunction with others on campus who are*

involved in field-based, independent learning. All such experiential opportunities should be more prominently brought to the attention of students. Students returning from such programs should work with the Career Center staff to bring this experience to the attention of other students and faculty, as well as to potential employers.

### Geographical Diversity

The vast majority of Amherst College students who study abroad do so in Western Europe. Very few students are living and learning in Asia, Africa, or Oceania, for instance. American study abroad in general remains highly focused on Europe. Currently about 65% of American students who go abroad study there (down from 75-80% earlier). Amherst College figures are consistent with national norms in this regard. Although the GCWG sees an academic program that includes study in Europe as preferable to one that contains no learning abroad, we recognize the value of expanding the diversity of our students' experiences. More effort is needed throughout the institution to expand the number and range of learning abroad programs beyond the traditional countries of Western Europe. *The GCWG, therefore, recommends that Amherst College accept a responsibility to direct the attention of its students to learning abroad opportunities in all corners of the world.* This could be accomplished by supporting more programs in places beyond Europe, by more aggressive and imaginative advising, or by a variety of other means. The Director of Overseas Learning cannot alone broaden the range of geographic destinations of our students.

Furthermore, we are convinced that the Amherst College curriculum contains certain structural disincentives to the study of the cultures and languages of certain areas of the world and that the modest structural changes proposed in the next section could entice a greater percentage of our students to develop expertise in these areas.

**Initiative 2: To encourage -- perhaps with new F.T.E.'s -- the development of integrated programs in the interdisciplinary study of global issues.**

During the spring, the GCWG asked the chairs of departments to inquire of their colleagues which of their courses have "substantial"

international content.<sup>4</sup> It is clear from their responses that the current curriculum features a good number of courses with such content. Moreover, students seem to be taking these courses. A review of the transcripts of the class of 2004 revealed most Amherst students -- even those who had neither studied a foreign language nor studied abroad -- had, in fact, taken at least two courses that were “substantially” international in content. Given the number and variety of such courses offered at Amherst College, it would be hard NOT to take at least two such courses over a four-year period.

The courses focused on international issues are scattered among a wide variety of departments. This, the GCWG thinks, is not itself a problem -- indeed, is to be applauded. The problem resides in that there are a limited number of integrated, interdisciplinary programs focusing on global issues easily available to our students. Although students may combine courses from a variety of departments into interdisciplinary majors, relatively few do so. One might ask why it should be incumbent upon young students with relatively little academic experience to design a globally focused program and to justify it before a faculty committee, as is currently the practice. This is perhaps an unreasonable burden and may account for the low numbers of students who choose to create such majors. If Amherst’s curricular structures offered enhanced opportunities for such a focused, systemic study of international issues, more students, we think, would do so. For example, one might imagine programs in 'human rights,' 'environmental problems,' or 'economic globalization.'

In addition, the GCWG is convinced that there are several departments already at Amherst College which could provide opportunities for such interdisciplinary study focusing on geographical and cultural regions. For example, the Asian Languages and Civilizations Department has adopted a curricular structure that allows for interdisciplinary flexibility and, at the same time, assures that its majors will have a concentration in a

---

<sup>4</sup> The definition of “substantial” was left up to the individual departments. The results are as follows: Anthropology, Asian Languages and Civilizations, Classics, European Studies, French, German, Spanish report that all of their courses fall under this category; Black Studies listed courses numbered 12-15, 29-32, 42-44, 70; Economics, 32-33, 36, 75; English, 19, 48, 55, 59, 65, 67, 71; Fine Arts, 32, 35, 46, 47-53, 56, 58, 61, 66, 70, 84, 89; History, 1, 3-7, 11-20, 22, 26-34, 52-55, 57, 61-64, 66-67, 72-76, 80, 86-90, 92-93; Political Science, 4, 7, 14-15, 20, 22, 25-27, 30-31, 45, 47-48, 54, 57, 61, 68-70, 72; Sociology, 26, 43; American Studies, Astronomy, Biology, Computer Science, Geology, Math, Philosophy, Physics and Psychology report that none of their courses can be described this way; remaining departments did not reply.

particular culture or set of cultures. It also strongly promotes language study and study abroad. This approach, with a proviso we discuss below, seems to the GCWG to be an ideal way in which to promote international study at Amherst College.

Except through the Five Colleges, comparable programs allowing the concentrated study of the cultural perspectives, social contexts, and geopolitical entanglements of, for example, Africa, of South and Central America and of the Middle East are not fully developed at Amherst College. Nor are there programs in those global concerns mentioned above. *The GCWG recommends that such interdisciplinary programs be created, if they do not yet exist, or enhanced, if they do.* One way to create such opportunities would be to establish new departments dedicated to such studies with the participation of knowledgeable Amherst faculty members. Another way would be to create a broader formal structure under which students could engage in interdisciplinary work about a geographic area not currently represented in the curriculum – as they could in an “International Studies” program or department. This might be the best route to follow because, in some cases, creating new “area studies” programs would overlap with existing opportunities for concentrated study. For example, Black Studies has traditionally covered a broad range of geographic areas for legitimate programmatic reasons. Therefore, its major does not concentrate on Africa. Although we applaud its curriculum and do not wish to suggest that the department should restrict itself to African concerns, we do think it would be desirable to provide our students with the opportunity to major in “African studies.” Whatever the administrative structures that the College might adopt for such programs, *we further recommend that all of the “area studies” departments, including Asian Languages and Civilizations, be encouraged to complement their teaching of the Humanities with additional joint hires and curricular offerings in the Social Sciences and, where appropriate, even perhaps in the Ecological Sciences.* Although developing sectors of the curriculum in terms of geographically defined “areas” is admittedly arbitrary, the GCWG feels that such administrative structures allow for a maximum amount of curricular flexibility over long stretches of time.

**Initiative 3: To increase modestly the number and diversity of international students on the Amherst College campus.**

During the 2004-2005 academic year, there are 115 international students at Amherst College.<sup>5</sup> This represents an increase from the 79 international students attending during 2001-2002. At the moment, international students are not admitted need-blind. However, currently, 67 international students receive \$2,418,678 in financial aid from the College – an average of \$36,100.<sup>6</sup>

This is to say that some international students are expensive to support at the College. Yet, the GCWG has reason to believe that there is interest among trustees and alumni in increasing the number of international students on campus. We see such an increase as a potentially important goal, but **only** if it is accompanied by efforts to widely convey the various points of view such students are likely to bring to ideas and issues. Students on our committee report that it is far more serendipitous than it should be for them to learn about the experiences and perspectives of the international students. Indeed, both the President and Vice-President of Amherst's International Students' Association confirm this. The latter recommend that, in addition to supporting cultural events such as dinners and performances, the College should make an effort to involve international students in events such as debates that address issues involving national and international relations. Furthermore, they acknowledge that, all too often, their organization and others like it are more concerned with lobbying for their particular interests than in conveying a valued perspective to all-campus discussions. Consequently, they suggest that panels be held throughout the academic year that would bring representatives of such organizations together to speak about what they collectively might offer to "majority" students concerning new ways of thinking about matters that matter to the United States within the world.

If such an increase were pursued, the College should of course never consider switching its laudable commitment to diversity away from minorities in the U.S. toward those from abroad. This commitment to minorities in the U.S. is especially important to maintain in the face of

---

<sup>5</sup> These come from thirty-three different countries: Australia (1), Bangladesh (1), Botswana (1), Brazil (1), Bulgaria (6), Canada (14), China (5), the Dominican Republic (1), England (2), Estonia (2), France (3), Ghana (4), Greece (1), Hong Kong (6), India (13), Indonesia (1), Israel (1), Jamaica (1), Japan (10), Korea (15), Lebanon (1), Nepal (2), New Zealand (1), Norway (1), Romania (2), Singapore (4), South Africa (1), Switzerland (1), Taiwan (1), Thailand (3), Trinidad and Tobago (2), Turkey (4) and the United Kingdom (4).

<sup>6</sup> 67 receive grant aid totaling \$2,240,819 – an average of \$33,445. 36 receive loans totaling \$87,610 – an average of \$2,434. And 62 are provided with student employment totaling \$90,249 -- an average of \$1,456.

apparent financial pressures: a significant number of international students do pay full-freight (52%) – far more, we venture, than do minority students recruited from within the U.S.

Despite our hesitations, there have been studies -- in particular a Rockefeller Foundation report -- suggesting that admitting a range of international students is a proven approach to complementing curricular efforts in global comprehension. *Therefore, the GCWG recommends that the number of diverse international students (diverse both culturally and socioeconomically) be increased by a modest amount, in the range of 2% of the matriculating class. However, the GCWG also feels that the College could produce a more beneficial effect, and have more control over the diversity of such students, if it established one-year student exchange programs that were linked to specific institutions in targeted areas of the world. This could provide opportunities for Amherst students and/or faculty to travel, study, and research abroad, while at the same time extending the presence of international students on campus.*

**Initiative Four: To assist students to study or work abroad outside of the academic year.**

Amherst is one of the few institutions in the country that allows its institutional financial aid to "travel." Consequently, for study abroad undertaken during the academic year, financial need is not an obstacle to any of Amherst's students. But, apart from the limited funding provided for short-term internships and projects by the Career Center Fellowships for Action -- funding which can be used overseas -- the College offers little financial support for students wishing to engage in overseas learning during the summer or immediately following graduation.

Many of the 60-65% of Amherst students who do not study or work abroad cannot do so during the academic year due to other commitments or obligations. Most cannot afford to do so after they receive their degrees. *The GCWG, therefore, recommends that the College establish and provide funding for ten Summer and five Post-Graduate Global Fellowships. Some of these Fellowships could be targeted for the study of languages that are not currently represented in the Amherst College curriculum, or for travel to those areas of the world that are not often visited. Such support might conceivably fund travel associated with specific courses that could offer, for example, an interterm or summer trip to sites related to the subject of the*

course. It could also provide inspiration and opportunities that do not otherwise exist and could prove a positive incentive for students to explore cultures and languages that are least often studied by Amherst College students.

**Initiative Five: To support faculty who wish opportunities to enhance their own global competencies through language-learning and/or closer scholarly engagement with international colleagues**

During the spring semester of 2004, the GCWG distributed a survey requesting information from colleagues about their knowledge of foreign languages, academic training abroad, and on-going research and collaboration with foreign colleagues. Here are the results.

Concerning languages: 102 members of the faculty responded, informing us that each had studied, on average, 2.8 languages, although the median level of current proficiency was midway between "fluent" and "rusty" or "poor." All together, they had studied 44 different foreign languages. In addition, 16 members of the faculty spoke a language other than English as their native tongue.

Concerning academic training abroad: 19% of respondents hold degrees from non-U.S. institutions; 44% studied in another country as part of their degrees from American institutions; 68% traveled abroad during their student years; 50% have worked outside of the U.S.

Concerning research and collaboration: 61% regularly travel abroad as part of their work as an Amherst College faculty member; 81% have presented work abroad or have been published in a foreign journal; 50% are now engaged in research projects with overseas colleagues.

These numbers indicate that Amherst faculty members possess a high degree of international experience and expertise. Moreover, it is clear that a substantial number of the respondents engage in activity of an international nature and that many of them use foreign languages as a normal part of their duties at the College. However, the median proficiency level of the faculty's foreign language skills would seem to indicate that not all faculty members have had the opportunity to maintain their skill level in a foreign language, which may limit their opportunities for international work. It is likely that some members of the faculty would wish to expand their knowledge of

foreign languages to enhance their research or to facilitate their activities involving international cooperation. *The GCWG therefore recommends that faculty members desiring such skills for purposes related to their normal functions at the College be eligible to apply for FRAP funds to acquire those skills.*

## **Conclusion**

In effect, the GCWG thinks that Amherst should commit itself to a general proposition: that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires students and faculty alike to understand the significance of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity. At present, however, Amherst College has in place no formal strategy or policies for internationalizing the campus. There are certainly many international activities well underway, of which study abroad is one. But it is difficult to consider study abroad alone, apart from the larger context of campus internationalization, formalized or *de facto*. After all, the 36-40% of students who do study abroad still spend the other six or seven semesters of their Amherst education on campus, while the rest spend all eight semesters on campus. The question is whether the campus is doing enough to prepare all students for the globalized world they all will be entering. We think not, but hope that the initiatives of this report might move us in this direction.

## APPENDIX

### LANGUAGE STUDY AT AMHERST, A GLANCE AT THE NUMBERS

#### **The Study of Foreign Languages at Amherst**

Although foreign language (FL) training is not the only component of “global comprehension,” it represents one aspect of the question that is relatively easy to define and quantify. The SCAE report points out that “70% of our students study a foreign language” (p. 5). In context, the implications of this figure are not entirely clear. But the SCAE committee seems to imply that it represents some measure of the “foreign language competence” of our graduates. The question of what constitutes “competence” is a thorny one that the GCWG feels unprepared to answer. For now, here is the quantitative picture.

The 70% figure in the report refers only to the graduates of the class of 2002, but it is consistent with the findings of an earlier study that showed that between 1989 and 1999, in each class, on average, 70% of our students had taken at least one course that was conducted in a foreign language. Among the students who took only one course, levels of competence might vary widely depending upon the course taken and the student’s performance in that course. If, for example, the course were a second-semester Russian course in which the student received a “D” during his or her sophomore year, the issue of the student’s foreign language competence at the time of graduation would certainly seem debatable.

Moreover, the 70% figure provides no information about the foreign language competence of the 30% of our graduates who have taken no FL courses during their undergraduate years. Have they had college-level language training in High School? Do they come from bilingual families? Do they come from disadvantaged backgrounds that did not provide the opportunity for foreign language study? And if so, why did they not take any foreign language courses at Amherst? The profile of the class of 2004 that follows is intended to allow for discussion of possible answers to some of these questions.

## Foreign Language training of the class of 2004

109 members of the class of 2004 graduated without taking any foreign language courses.<sup>7</sup> This number represents 25.5% of the class. Another 18% took only one such course, bringing the total of the group whose level of FL competence is not easily discernible from a computer search to 43% of the class.

### Competence among students who took one course (18%--88 students)

Among those students who took one FL course during their undergraduate years, 67% completed only a course from a first-year sequence. Most of these completed only the first semester of the language studied. That is to say that they did not reach the minimal level of competence defined by foreign language requirements in most institutions where requirements exist. 14.8% of them completed only a third-semester course.

To get an idea of the level of competence that these numbers represent, it is helpful to compare these figures to national standards. One standard widely used for College placement equates one year of High School FL study with one semester of college-level training, so that for example the expectations of a third-year secondary school program correspond roughly to those of the third semester of college-level instruction. The FL courses at Amherst College tend to be accelerated relative to national norms. But this measure can still provide us with a crude picture of the level of competence achieved by the students who have taken only one course at Amherst.

By this standard, 81.8% (72) of the 88 students who took one FL course at the College never achieved a level of competence beyond the FL skills that could be reached in the third year of a solid High School program. 93% of the students who took only one course at Amherst never advanced beyond the level of the fourth semester of their respective programs.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> We include in our definition of foreign languages Greek and Latin. The previous studies did not include these.

<sup>8</sup> On the bright side, 54.5% of these students received grades in the "A" range in the single course that they took. 17% received a grade of "B+." It does not appear that these students declined to pursue a higher level of competence due to poor aptitude for foreign languages.

Foreign Language competence among students who took no foreign language courses at Amherst (25.5%--109 students)

The FL competence of the students who did not take any FL courses before graduation is more difficult to gauge. To get a rough picture of our matriculants' FL competence, most of the reliable information at our disposal lies in their High School transcripts.

Of the 109 students who took no FL courses at Amherst before graduation, roughly 48% stopped taking FLs before their senior year of High School. 11% stopped taking FLs after their sophomore year. Only 51% studied FLs through all four years of High School.

These numbers are difficult to interpret, since it is conceivable that some students who stop taking FLs after their junior year had followed accelerated courses that brought them to the end of their school's program before their senior year. These qualifications aside, it is difficult to imagine that a student who has stopped taking FL courses after her or his junior year of High School will have retained many of the FL skills that he or she had acquired at the time of graduation from College. Those who have stopped after the sophomore year of High School quite credibly will have no skills left by the time they graduate from Amherst.

The SCAE committee assumes that a significant percentage of these students come from bilingual or even trilingual families (p. 5). The numbers that are readily available for the class of 2004 do not, however, confirm this assumption.<sup>9</sup> It is, in any case, to be expected that there would be low percentages of students in these categories among the students who take no FL courses. Bilingual families tend to understand the value of studying foreign languages.

During the discussions leading up to the SCAE report, some faculty members expressed concern that some groups of students might be disproportionately represented among those graduates who are not acquiring basic skills at the College before graduation. We have found that students of

---

<sup>9</sup> Among students who self-identify as Hispanic, only 7.9% (3) did not take any FL courses before graduating from Amherst. Among those who are classified by the College "Non-resident Aliens" (foreign students), only 12.5% (3) appear on the list of graduates who have taken 0 FL courses. Even if one assumes that these students came from non-Anglophone or bilingual families (which is not a given), the percentages discussed above would be changed very little if they were dropped from the list.

color are less likely to have taken no courses in foreign languages than their white classmates. We have also found that those matriculants who were awarded admission primarily on the basis of their athletic prowess appear in disproportionate numbers among those who do not study foreign languages. This group accounts for 25.7% of all students who took no FL courses before graduation. Students from both of these groups appear among foreign language majors in proportions that are equal to their classmates. Our numbers are available upon request.

Of the 109 students who took no FL courses during their undergraduate years, 20 or 18.3% went on study abroad programs for at least one semester.<sup>10</sup> **This leaves approximately 89 students, or 20.8% of the class of 2004 who neither studied a foreign language nor went on a study abroad program.**

### **The Unintended Effects of Foreign Language Requirements**

Many institutions of higher education have foreign language requirements. Among the 10 institutions visited by the SCAE committee, only 5 had foreign language course requirements for graduation. None of them could be considered to have a College-level foreign language requirement, however, since none of them expect students to complete courses beyond the levels that can be achieved in a strong secondary school program. They are fixed at levels that would be comparable to requiring our graduates to have taken courses in Advanced Algebra and Trigonometry while in college.

**The effects of commonplace foreign language requirements on the aggregate “foreign language competency” of graduates are, perhaps paradoxically, negative.**<sup>11</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that Amherst is clearly advancing higher percentages of its students into higher levels of “foreign language competence” than many, if not all of its competitors. Amherst College has graduated approximately 60 foreign language majors (or between 13% and 16% of the class) in each of the last five classes. The success that Amherst College has had in producing foreign language majors is in part a function of the open curriculum. Institutions that have foreign language requirements, like the schools discussed above,

---

<sup>10</sup> All but two of these went to England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, or New Zealand. The others went to Hungary and South Africa in English-language programs.

<sup>11</sup> The numbers supporting this assertion can be provided upon request.

also have other requirements. In those institutions where there are substantial breadth requirements, few students find the space required in their four-year programs to reach advanced standing in a foreign language and complete a major in their area of interest.

Amherst has been down this road before. According to President Cole, it was the unintended effect of the “Kennedy Curriculum,” introduced for the class of 1951, to cause a radical drop in enrollment in foreign language courses at the College.<sup>12</sup> The unanticipated effect of the distribution requirements was to discourage the study of foreign languages at the advanced level.<sup>13</sup>

The foreign language requirement established by the “Kennedy Curriculum” was “so designed that nearly all freshmen should be able to satisfy it by the end of their first year” (p. 13). The attrition statistics included in the President’s report indicate that most students fulfilled their requirement in one semester of remedial-level study and never returned to foreign languages.<sup>14</sup> The drop in Amherst graduates’ foreign language competency was so precipitous that at the end of the 50’s, when the “Kennedy Curriculum” was reviewed, the committee recommended the establishment of a “requirement of a foreign language course at the literature level.”<sup>15</sup> The College declined to adopt the recommended requirement. As a consequence, a very high percentage of two decades of Amherst College graduates were underprepared in foreign language study. There were undoubtedly exceptions, of course, most likely among those students who came from wealthy families that could afford to send their children abroad for foreign study before or after their undergraduate studies or during the

---

<sup>12</sup> See p. 17 of Cole's President's Report 1946-56, Amherst College Archives, where he confirms that "the figures on department registrations given below form an important record of changes caused by the introduction of the new curriculum."

<sup>13</sup> If a student did not prioritize language study by choosing it as a major—and at that time, students chose only one major—there was no room in his program to develop his language skills much further than the levels prescribed by the minimal requirements for a degree. President Cole laments further on in his report that "our advanced courses in Modern Languages have smaller and smaller registrations" (p. 17).

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see “A Brief History of the Romance Languages at Amherst College” at <http://www.amherst.edu/~french/Hist.menu.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See President's Report 1958-59, p. 8. Amherst College Archives. Peter Pouncey's 1987 report echoes the call made by the review committee. Pouncey maintained that, if such a language requirement were to be instituted, "a single literature course might suffice" (p. 13). But he added that the sufficiency of such a requirement was contingent upon the Admission Office's seriousness about the College's guidelines for the foreign language preparation of the applicants prior to matriculation.

summers. The numbers of foreign language registrations and majors did not begin to recover until the College abandoned breadth requirements.