

**Forwarded by Assoc. Dean Patricia Paulsell 9/27/04**

September 24, 2004

To: University Committee on Academic Policy

From: Nancy Marino, Chair, Spanish and Portuguese; David Prestel, Chair, Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African languages; John Rauk, Chair, Classics, French and Italian

Subject: Tier II Writing Requirement in Modern Languages

As chairs of the MSU language departments we are writing to request recognition by UCAP that it has been the practice for the past 13 years, since institution of the Tier II Writing Requirement, to teach the Tier II Writing courses in the target language of each program. When the decisions were made by the units regarding designation of Tier II Writing status to courses, the directive from the University was to provide experience for students in writing in the discipline. The Report of the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements (1990) states that after completing the Tier II requirement, "Students should have received instruction and practice in the tasks, forms and styles of writing appropriate to their discipline or profession" (p. 7). Unfortunately, because the standards of the fields of French, Spanish, German, and Russian consist of being able to write in edited French, Spanish German, and Russian, this is in conflict with another stated purpose of the Tier II requirement that students learn "edited English appropriate to the standards of the disciplinary and professional programs in which they are enrolled" (p. 7). Given this inconsistency in the requirements with respect to foreign languages, as well as in our interpretation of them, we are requesting that, for the present, UCAP recognize the current status and acknowledge the interpretation of the language departments of the Tier II Writing mandate--and particularly its spirit of writing in the discipline--pending the recommendations of the current Tier II Writing Task Force.

As an appendix to our request we note the following points in support of our contention that in order to be able to write an academic paper in the second language (L2), students need to write in the L2 in their classes, and not in English.

- Learning to speak an L2 does not translate into being able to write well in an L2. Just as those who speak English cannot necessarily write academic English well, those who can speak an L2 need to learn the *written* discourse of the L2. This is particularly true for heritage learners who are often conversationally fluent but lack academic literacy skills in foreign language.
- The written modality is an additional form of language output (i.e., production). It is now widely agreed that learners need more than input (i.e., exposure) to be able to speak and write well in an L2. When writing, students have time to stop

and focus on the form of their language (i.e., grammar and vocabulary) as opposed to just the meaning. If students only speak in the L2 and don't write, they will never perfect their written discourse to the level needed to be able to write in their discipline.

- Written output from the students gives instructors additional opportunities to assess learners' language. Writing in the L2 about the course content gives instructors an opportunity to draw learners' attention to their language problems. This attention is necessary for learners to progress in terms of their grammar and vocabulary.
- Learning to write academic English does not ensure that students will learn to write academic discourse in the L2. Writing is a learned behavior whose conventions have to be specifically taught and whose conventions are culturally specific.
- Asking students to write in English in Tier II foreign language classes would be detrimental to learning. It is essential that 400-level language classes be taught in the L2. Students need to be immersed in the L2 and class discussions and content, including readings and videos, need to be in the L2. Although improving general the overall language skills of foreign language majors, as opposed to only writing skills, is not a goal of the Tier II requirement, it is a worthwhile one.