

Trinity College

## Trinity College Digital Repository

---

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

---

Spring 2023

### Student Experience with the Second-Language Requirement at Trinity College

Alberlis Hernandez  
ahernan3@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hernandez, Alberlis, "Student Experience with the Second-Language Requirement at Trinity College".  
Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2023.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/1005>

“Student Experience with the Second-Language Requirement at Trinity College”

Alberlis Hernandez

Educational Studies 400: Senior Research Project

Educational Studies Program

Faculty Advisor: Britney Jones

Trinity College Hartford, CT

Fall 2022

**Abstract**

This study answers the research questions: How do students describe their experience with the Second-Language Requirement (SLR) at Trinity College? To what extent do these experiences align with what Trinity College aims to offer students? Through a qualitative study, interviews were conducted with nine participants. This study was performed at Trinity College, and participants were current Trinity students when this essay was published. Data showed that almost all participants supported the implementation of a second language requirement, although more than half of the participants described having a negative experience with the SLR at Trinity College. I argue that the SLR should be improved so that students get the most advantages out of these classes. Students seek language instruction and exposure to foreign cultures yet understand that the SLR needs to offer this more effectively. In addition, findings indicate inconsistencies in how Trinity students understand the SLR, suggesting there needs to be better alignment between Trinity administration and students. Thus, as it currently is the SLR is lacking in its implementation.

## Introduction

Competitive colleges and universities tend to support taking a second language as a means of better preparing students to be culturally aware and have skills that make them competitive in the job market. This support results from extensive research showing the benefits of learning a second language. My essay will offer insight into how attitudes toward required classes in a foreign language may impact a student's experience in those courses. Specifically looking into the campus at Trinity College, I will research current student experiences with the Second-Language Requirement (SLR) and how these experiences align with Trinity College's intention behind the requirement.

This research study aims to gain more insight into Trinity College's Second-Language Requirement. This topic is essential because it will benefit students by examining how the requirement affects academic life compared to what Trinity claims to offer students. As written in the most recent publication of the Trinity College Bulletin, the SLR is part of the second key component in Trinity's general curriculum. This second component, named Foundational Skills, aims for Trinity students to have the basic tools needed for success in today's world (Bulletin 2021-2022, p. 31). The college recognizes the social relevance of having its students learn a second language. My study presents how Trinity students understand this requirement compared with how the Trinity College administration publishes this requirement is supposed to benefit students. Thus, the research questions posed in this study are: How do students describe their experience with the Second-Language Requirement at Trinity? To what extent do these experiences align with what Trinity aims to offer students?

## Literature Review

### Second Language in Education

The second language acquisition theory can be traced to linguist Stephan Krashen. In this theory, he explains that one learns language in two channels: one is by acquisition, and the other is by learning. Language acquisition means the learner undergoes an unconscious process through communication practice. On the other hand, language learning refers to a conscious process of learning the language, such as by memorizing grammar rules. The theory establishes language acquisition as a more meaningful interaction toward learning a language than language learning (Schütz, 2007, p. 2). This is significant because this encourages a shift towards placing students in a language learning system using natural communicative input to design class syllabi (Schütz, 2007, p. 3).

This theory becomes the basis of Changyu Li's research on college English classes in China. In *A Research on Second Language Acquisition and College English Teaching*, Li focuses on the influences of a learner's personality, motivation, attitudes, and intelligence on language acquisition. This study is relevant because it uses the language acquisition approach to understand factors that create differences among second language learners and their success in the language. Li found that learning motivation and attitudes are emotional factors that significantly change the result of second language acquisition- generally, the greater the learning motivation, the more lasting learning activities are for the student (Li, 2009, p. 58). From Li's findings, we can begin to realize the expectations of foreign language classrooms in a higher education setting, as well as what we set as standards for the success of learning a second language. As Li suggests,

“... learners’ acquisition process as well as the rules of language acquisition should be taken into consideration when establishing teaching plans in order to set up a student-centered language learning pattern and to design specific class activities and teaching skills. Besides, real, interesting, relevant and various language subject matters and materials should be chosen to put students into contact with a large amount of understandable language input, offer more real language communication opportunities, stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning and therefore to improve their efficiency and achievement in language learning.” (Li, 2009, p. 58)

Effective language acquisition is established in the classroom using a student-centered class teaching pattern. This pattern looks like delivering intercultural communication knowledge, cultivating students’ intercultural communication abilities, creating a language acquisition environment, fully considering students’ emotional factors, and improving the teaching quality and learning effect of college foreign language learning (Li, 2009, p. 58). These concepts are relevant when we ask ourselves why we should learn a second language and the relevance motivation might have when we make this genre of classes a requirement for students in higher education. Moving ahead, these researchers present what language acquisition looks like to students and in a classroom.

### **Student Perceptions of Foreign Language Requirement**

Researchers Joseph Price and Carolyn Gascoigne published a study in 2006 to catalog and report perceptions and attitudes of incoming first-year college students concerning foreign

language study. The study occurred between 2003 and 2006 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Their data consisted of 155 essays written by incoming first-year students at UNO. In the essay, students had 90 minutes to complete an open-ended forum where they articulated their feelings about foreign language study.

An analysis of student essays revealed overwhelming support for foreign language study, mainly foreign language requirements (Price & Gascoigne, 2006, p. 388). Across the essays, more than half of them cited positive aspects of foreign language study. The most frequent pro-argument was on cultural understanding and how foreign language classes are an excellent method to explore new cultures. The second most cited argument in the essays supporting foreign language study was individual job/career success. On the other hand, the most cited reason for not studying a foreign language was that students did not find it necessary. Among all the essays, 30.92% of students cited that reason, and approximately 15% of responses against foreign language were on time commitment and cost (Price & Gascoigne, 2006, p. 388).

On the argument for foreign language study, almost all students responded with what they can do with a foreign language. With few exceptions, essays revealed that students value foreign language study more for personal growth and understanding other cultures than for practical and financial gain (Price & Gascoigne, 2006, p. 391). This literature is relevant to understanding what students believe they will get from second-language classes.

### **Background: Second-Language Requirement at Trinity College**

Trinity College once had a language requirement as part of its general curriculum, but eliminated it within the late 1960s and early 1970s. The requirement got eliminated because Trinity wanted to open the curriculum as part of providing a liberal arts education. Eventually, in

the spring of 2007, administrators began to consider if second-language courses should once again be a requirement for students. By the fall of 2008, Trinity determined to add a new foreign language requirement that would commence with first-year students in the Class of 2012 who matriculated that fall.

In 2009, Trinity student (now a Trinity alumni) Sunny Park wrote their senior thesis on student perspectives about the second-language requirement at Trinity College. For his research, Park interviewed faculty and first-year students about their perspectives on the SLR. Park attributed the emphasis on learning a language other than English to social and political reasons such as globalization, World War II, and the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Additionally, Park found that Trinity students and faculty clearly understand the importance and benefits of learning a second language. However, a debate began on whether second-language courses should be made a requirement at Trinity. To understand the members' perspectives of Trinity College and their stances on the debate, Park's study remains relevant to offer insight into arguments at the start of the requirement's implementation.

The goals of the requirement that faculty members expressed to Park included that it would broaden students' views, prepare students for globalization, increase enrollment rate, promote students to study abroad, and improve Trinity students' relationship with the world (Park, 2009, pg. 9-10). In the results of Park's interviews, these goals aligned with what students said who agreed with the requirement, yet students against it argued it should remain an elective because it frays from their choice of major (Park, 2009, p. 12-13).

On the Trinity College website about the SLR, these are the posted reasons behind the implementation of the requirement:



Trinity's second-language foundational requirement supports the College's learning goal of ensuring that all students "become effective communicators...across various contexts, languages, and media." The language requirement enables students to gain basic writing, listening, speaking, and reading skills in a language other than English. Language classes help you structure and maintain a daily routine, which is useful during your hectic first year. They can also anchor your place in college by building close relationships with both the instructor and your classmates. Language skills open new doors, prepare you for study-away opportunities, give you an advantage in a competitive job market, and expose you to new cultural mindsets. (Second-language requirement)

Currently, Trinity students can take a placement test so that they may continue studying a language they have already been exposed to in previous academic settings or start introductory courses in a new language. Students from a non-English speaking country or who have demonstrated language proficiency through official certifications such as AP classes or their transcripts can opt out of the requirement. Trinity's Bulletin, a document published annually by the college, breaks down the general requirements mandated for each student, including the SLR. It is written under the section of the SLR, "The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that all students possess knowledge of a language other than English." (Bulletin 2021-2022, 31). The main arguments promoted by the college towards the SLR are to gain skills in a language other than English, increase abroad opportunities, and add skills to students as future workers.

## **Methods**

### **Methodology**

For this research, I used a qualitative study design to gather Trinity students' perceptions of the SLR. There needs to be more understanding of how students perceive the SLR at Trinity, and qualitative research allowed me to further understand this. The purpose of the present study is to understand what it means for students to have an SLR at this higher education institution, and this research will provide depth of data acquired (Merriam, 5). Data was acquired by interviewing students using semi-structured, open-ended questions. This methodology offers rich responses by students to enable a well-rounded understanding of their beliefs. In addition, interviews were done within thirty minutes and over zoom to accommodate the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, a personalized exchange of information with engaging conversations in the interviews can further promote rich responses. The study was conducted during the academic semester fall of 2022.

### **Participants**

Nine students participated in this study. Interview participants were Trinity students of different class years who were required to complete the language requirement. Since there was a limited number of participants due to time constriction, the students interviewed had to experience direct involvement with the second-language department to ensure that responses were most relevant. Merriam (2002) explains this as purposeful sampling (p. 12), where the sample identified is from which the most information can be learned and is most relevant in relation to the topic. Since the study focuses on experience with the SLR, the participants of this study were students who did not qualify to opt-out. Of the participants, four were in the class of 2023, four were in the class of 2024, and 1 student was in the class of 2026. All except for two students chose Spanish as the second language to complete the requirement. The other two

students chose German and French. In terms of participant demographics, everyone answered how they self-identified for race and ethnicity. In this study, two students identified as White (non-Hispanic), one as White (Hispanic), and six as Black (non-Hispanic). The interview participants were students across many majors: Public Policy & Law, Sociology, Human Rights, American Studies, Psychology, Theater & Dance, English Literature, and Anthropology. Thus, while this study only consisted of 9 participants, there was a range of class years, languages chosen, and majors.

### **Data collection**

Before data collection could begin, a proposal for this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This step was necessary because participants gave individually identifiable data that, if leaked, may result in embarrassment or other personal harm due to a breach of confidentiality. Once the study received approval from the IRB, flyers were posted throughout Trinity's campus to recruit participants. Interested students could scan a QR code in the flyer to fill out a Google form. In this form, participants gave general contact information, a location to mail the incentive, what classes they have taken towards the requirement (if any), and what times they are available to meet (see Appendix A). After completing the Google form, participants were contacted individually to set up a meeting for the interview. In addition to sharing the flyer, I also gained participants through snowball sampling. I promoted a \$5 gift card incentive to The Underground, an on-campus coffee shop located at Trinity College, to gain participants. Since the interviews were on zoom, the application's recording capabilities helped edit individual transcriptions. All personal data received from responses to the Google form, zoom recordings, and transcripts were placed in a

password-protected file that was deleted at the end of the study. In the interview protocol, students were asked questions regarding: prior experiences in language acquisition, experiences in language courses taken at Trinity, proficiency, reasons behind language selection, and opinions on the SLR (see Appendix B).

### **Data analysis**

Coding turns qualitative data (transcripts) into quantitative data (codes) to develop interpretations. For my data analysis I engaged in multiple rounds of data analysis by coding transcripts in search of patterns. The first round of coding started by following the method of open coding. Here, interview transcripts were closely reviewed, highlighting basic units or broad themes in responses. Since there was an interview protocol, the participants spoke about the same topics, but responses differed through a student's individual experience. The protocol aimed to get rich responses, but the biggest barrier found in reviewing transcripts was that participants often gave concise responses. Thus, for this coding round, responses were separated based on common experiences or values with the interviewees. The next round followed inductive coding, which required marking passages and text sentences with a code. Then, themes could emerge from the data through repeated examination and comparison. This study uses inductive coding because it is an approach in which one can analyze data in areas with limited knowledge (Chandra & Shang, 2019). My final codebook, which contains categories that the data got divided into, can be found in Appendix C.

Through the coding process patterns emerged in how students talked about their experiences. The structure of the interview protocol allowed for engagement with participants through conversations while sticking to the big question of the study. In finding patterns between

responses, the last coding round involved marking how frequently child codes appeared for each participant. For example, if a participant did respond with study abroad (SA) as a reason for the language they chose to complete the SLR, I would also add a count to the code in addition to the student's response. If they responded with reasons like gaining a skill that they could add to their resume (RE) and being inspired to learn more about a language that their family speaks (FM), I would add one count to both child codes for that individual participant. This coding round offered a numerical understanding of the prevalence of themes across participants. Therefore, numerical values will emphasize the least or most important pattern depending on how often it came across in the interviews.

Looking at data through the lens of race, we must apply Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso's theory of counter-storytelling as an analytical framework. Critical race methodology is an approach to research grounded in critical race theory, the theory that race is a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. Critical race theory focuses on how social reality is constructed by formulating and exchanging stories about individual situations (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This theory challenges traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Researchers Solórzano and Tara define an analytical method of analyzing critical race methods as counter story-telling, "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" including people of color, women, gay, and the poor (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). These counterstories and narratives stand in opposition to narratives of dominance. Thus, it is relevant to use this framework when analyzing the responses of participants since many of them identified as a person of color.

After applying this framework, there were no consistencies or themes in the data to suggest race to influence student experiences with the SLR. When applying counter-storytelling, experiences told were similar across participant identities.

### **Findings**

I found that although nearly all Trinity students interviewed supported the concept of a Second Language Requirement, less than half had a positive experience because their reality did not match the ideal expectations

Trinity College implemented an SLR so that students gain basic writing, listening, speaking, and reading skills in a language other than English. Trinity proposes that because of taking these second-language courses, students will be more prepared for study-away opportunities, have an advantage in the job market, gain relationships with the instructor and classmates, and get exposure to new cultural mindsets. However, most of the interview participants had differing experiences at Trinity than one would expect from the statement above.

What I found was that students do not really understand the purpose and intent behind the SLR, and most of them had negative experiences in their second-language classes. All students chose a familiar language to study, inhibiting them to take advantage of the classes. At the same time, all but one student was very supportive of Trinity requiring second-language courses and spoke about ways to improve the SLR's implementation so that students get the most out of those classes.

### **A Familiar Language**

One big theme that emerged in this study is that all of the participants chose a familiar language to complete the SLR. In other words, all interview participants already studied the

language they pursued at Trinity to complete the SLR for at least two years before their college career. The participants are all taking classes in a language they already had experience with within an academic setting.

*“I really chose Spanish because that’s the subject that I’ve learned for so long. And I was just like, why not continue studying that?”*

*“I didn’t want to start over in a completely new language”*

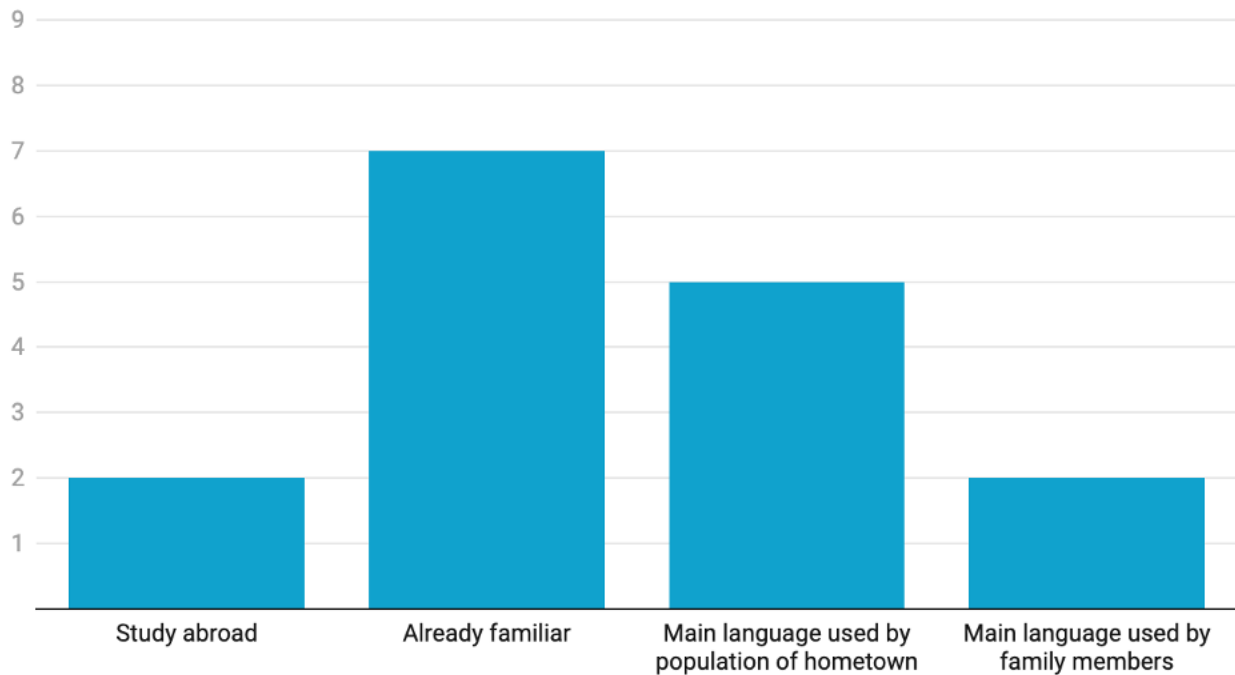
*“I was already kind of familiar with language, so I just thought it would be easier to continue with it”*

*“I feel like I’ve taken so many Spanish classes. I have a foundation in Spanish, and I think it will be very difficult to start over with a new language... At the same time, a lot of my friends and the people I am interacting with are Spanish speakers so it makes me want to communicate with them in their own language”*

Students are choosing languages they feel most familiar with and not engaging in ones that are new to them. We can say that students are not trying to pursue knowledge of new cultures and languages when given the opportunity through the SLR. This phenomenon is because students realize the difficulty of learning a new language and want to do something other than a course that they will find too difficult. Students understand the intent and motivation behind learning a language and are conflicted with taking challenging courses that may lower their GPA. When considering the difficulty of learning a language and the possibility of earning a low grade in a

course, students choose languages they already have some prior understanding to have the upper hand in these second-language classes. The chart below presents four main reasons students expressed behind the language they chose to study at Trinity:

### Student Reasons Behind Language Chosen



Students have engaged with a second language in an academic setting prior to Trinity. They continue with it at Trinity because familiarity increases their motivation to gain proficiency and makes language learning feel easier. While the SLR is meant to expose students to *new* cultural mindsets, participants of this study would instead take a class about a culture they already know.

### Student Experience with SLR

Of the participants, one had yet to start taking language courses to complete their SLR, so they could not give first-hand experience with the language courses. Nevertheless, three



participants agreed they had positive experiences in the courses they completed toward the SLR. Two of these students studied abroad in a country with their language of choice as their primary language. These students consistently engaged in the language in and outside of the classroom. All three had reasons behind an intrinsic motivation towards learning the language and mentioned positive relationships with their professors and peers outside their classes.

*“I enjoyed it [language classes at Trinity] because, me personally, I always wanted to actually learn Spanish and understand it. So my motivations for the classes is to increase my understanding [in the language]”*

*“I liked my professors...They were really interested in making sure that we were using the language as much as possible in the classroom...I enjoyed learning Spanish and like being able to speak it in class and being able to make mistakes and be okay with making mistakes and learning from those mistakes”*

*“I really really liked my professors. Um, and I liked the way they ran the class...”*

On the other hand, five interview participants agreed that their overall experience with the SLR was negative.

*“I could tell my [professor] was passionate about what we were learning... but the execution wasn't always helpful, where she was very disorganized... It was a lot of like random vocab, like random videos... It was just like whatever we were doing that day is what she decided she wanted to do”*

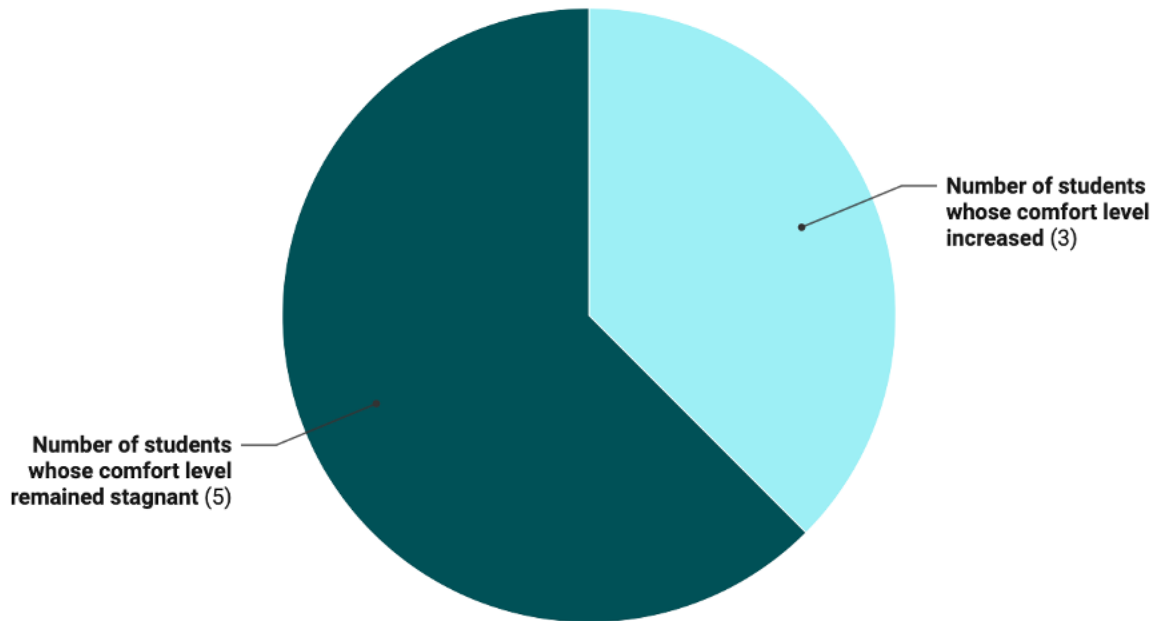
*“There were some funny moments in class; the times that I actually enjoyed my Spanish classes here was when we talked more about the culture in different countries... in terms of learning the actual language, I found no enjoyment... For the instructor I had it was all through McGraw Hill connect so it was all digitized... If this class was taught over covid, it would gone the exact same way... I didn't learn anything new [from the language classes]”*

*“It was one of those side classes [referring to language classes], and I feel like I already struggle a lot in school like I have a lot of accommodations so it was very dreading to go to those classes”*

Completing the requirement added stress to these students' academic careers at Trinity. Negative comments took the form of comments on the class structure. They claim that their language classes could have been more organized and engaging. One student mentioned that if the language course they took were to switch to remote, everything would be the same because the in-person class heavily relied on online tools. The participants felt they needed to be more engaged with the language and that it was not relevant to the major they pursued. Based on participants' experiences and how they understand the SLR, there is an overall recognition of the importance of learning new cultures. While they disliked experiences with learning the language, they felt that when teachers involved the culture through forms such as going to cultural events on campus, students felt this type of material was more relevant and engaging.

Interestingly, a student's experience (whether positive or negative) was not consistent with their language skills. Students were asked to define their comfort level in engaging with the second language they chose in the form of reading, writing, and speaking in courses prior to arriving at Trinity and repeated the question for courses they took at Trinity. The chart compares the responses to these experiences.

## Comfort Level Engaging in a Second-language (reading, writing and speaking) Prior to Trinity Versus After Trinity



The participant who had yet to start taking language classes at Trinity was not included in this chart's data set. In the chart, we can tell those three students found that their level of reading, writing, and speaking in a second language increased after taking language courses at Trinity. Then, five students said their comfort level reading, writing, and speaking in a second language remained the same even after taking language courses at Trinity. We can note that none of the participants described a decreased comfort level engaging in a second language. The students who regarded their SLR experience as positive or negative would not be consistent with how they described their comfort level; in fact, there was no relationship between the two.

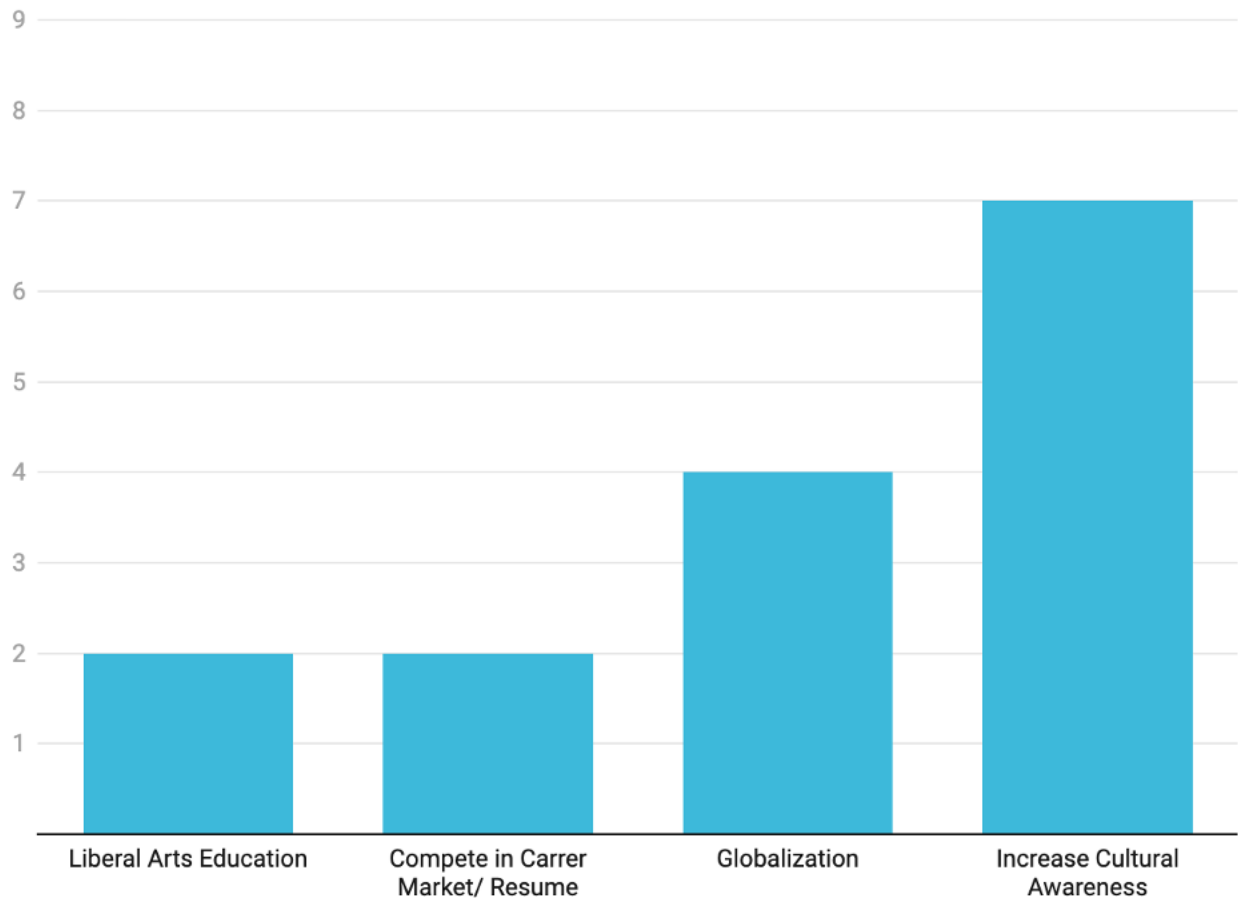
### Student Understanding of SLR

Another theme is that there were inconsistencies in how students understood why Trinity included the SLR in its curriculum.

*“I don't know. I don't know what they want. I think its because we have a large international student population, and like, they see how like they speak English so they want to like show that we can learn languages, too”*

This quote was like others- many participants did not have a cohesive understanding of why an SLR exists. When participants responded to why they believed Trinity included an SLR, their responses stuck to four main themes. The responses I received consisted of Trinity including foreign language as a requirement because it is a liberal arts college, and, learning a second language is a skill that can be included in a resume so students can better compete in the job market as a graduate. Additionally, a third reason consisted of Trinity having an SLR so students can be more knowledgeable and engaged in international affairs, and finally so that Trinity engages its students in learning foreign cultures. Interestingly, students stuck to these four themes without outside influence. Interview participants mentioned at least one of these reasons for why an SLR exists in their interview. For each interview, I checked which themes were mentioned during my third coding round. If a student spoke about all four of these themes, I added a count to each theme for the child code, and if a student only spoke about one theme in their interview, then one count was added to that single child code. The chart below graphs the number of times these themes arose across all participants:

## Students Beliefs Behind Purpose of SLR



Only two students spoke about Trinity's liberal arts education as to why it would include an SLR, and two spoke about a second language being something to include in their resume. Four students understood Trinity having an SLR for globalization reasons, such as having internationally aware students. Seven participants spoke about increasing cultural awareness for why they believe there is an SLR. These responses present that students focus on cultural awareness as an important result of SLR. In interviews, students understand that it is socially and politically relevant today to be aware of cultures other than oneself. When asking students about their experience with the SLR, whether positive or negative, they enjoyed it when teachers had them learn about the language's culture. There needs to be better communication between the

college and students regarding the requirements in the curriculum. This gap in how students understand the SLR permits negative pushback and attitudes toward it. If Trinity College communicated its reasoning behind its curriculum, students might be more intentional with their classes.

When students responded to what they gained from language courses at Trinity, responses were regarding their language proficiency.

*“Proficiency comes more in the actual practice of using it [language] and when you have a class thats just for a requirement, and nobody is actually caring about it, youre not really going to get proficient in that”*

*“I don't. Maybe I learned like a few more words. I'm not good with grammar, so I never remember the grammar, which is bad, but I probably learned a few more words like a more vocabulary.”*

*“Like I said, I hadn't really gained anything um I didn't gain any skills on how to study it better, and so I didn't really even regain anything like even the things that were in Spanish 102 I forgot them. All the things I remember from Spanish are the things I learned when I was in elementary school”*

*“It's literally just going to go in one ear and out the other. So even if I did gain something, it's gone now.”*

Although students identified broad reasons for learning a second language, such as cultural awareness, what they felt they got from the classes was very different. Students understanding of

what they are getting from these language classes was based on how well they know a language and did not think about other benefits like those in Trinity's Bulletin, such as preparing them for study-abroad opportunities. Many students said they are not getting any benefits from the classes. There are inconsistencies in why students believe the SLR exists, what students gain from language courses, and why Trinity is implementing an SLR.

### **Student Support of SLR**

Overall, eight students found themselves supportive of the SLR. Although some students had negative experiences, these participants understood the higher intent behind the SLR as a requirement meant to benefit them. The most frequent reason students provided as to why they support the requirement is that they found importance in increasing cultural awareness.

*“I think its important if you have the ability to try and learn a second language... its important to connect with other people... when you look at Trinity’s language requirement you won’t actually get to learn a language... I think it [the requirement] needs to be changed where like in lieu of a foreign language there could be like a cultural study or something so you could take a West African religions class, or you can take a Spanish class to learn the language and culture”*

These quotes are relevant because students understand the potential behind learning a second language as citizens today but say that the SLR needs to be more effective. Having an SLR is essential, but its current implementation has much pushback from students because they do not have positive experiences.

Two participants responded that their support of the SLR was because Trinity serves a predominately white demographic. These two students self-identified as Black. As they

understood themselves as a minority demographic, they also understood that Trinity should offer opportunities to engage its students in other cultures and languages because it is predominately white. They said that Trinity has to consider the student demographic and properly expose its students to other cultures in an academic setting that they may not have had before.

*“We have a very particular demographic here, and this is a predominately white institution, and I don’t think it there was this requirement as many people would take second language classes”*

*“We need this requirement because when you learn about the language you learn about the culture... it should remain a requirement because Trinity is a racist campus and I know for a fact a lot of people here will not purposefully take a language course”*

These responses are relevant because they highlight the importance of race in analyzing the data. About six participants identify as Black students, and three identify as White. The racial demographic of participants is not representative of the racial demographic of Trinity College, as it is a predominately white institution. In this study, data unintentionally offers knowledge of the experiences of minority students. Outside of the two responses Black-identifying participants gave regarding their reasoning for support of the SLR, student experiences did not differ by race.

### **Not Supportive of SLR**

Moving forward, one interviewee was not supportive of the SLR because they could not foresee it as a positive addition to their academic career.



*“I just think that there are a lot of requirements that are not really useful towards my Major, like maybe it would be helpful for other people, but not my path... you have to have an interest for learning languages and I dont have any”*

A typical student response was about how the classes added much stress and were irrelevant. However, only this participant argued that SLR is a negative addition to their career at Trinity. Furthermore, four participants mentioned they would still have taken a language course even if the SLR was not in place. Five participants would not have taken a language course at Trinity if the SLR was not in place. These students understand these language courses to be difficult and to take the place of another class they would be more interested in taking. However, two students of these five expressed future interest in learning a language outside their academic career at Trinity. Here, we can see that, once again, students understand the relevance of learning a language, but it does not seem to fit positively in their academic careers.

Altogether, the data shows differences between how students understand the SLR and what goals Trinity plans to achieve through the SLR. They acknowledge the relevance of learning new cultures behind implementing an SLR more often than direct language skills. More than half of the participants in this study believe they gained nothing from language courses at Trinity, and many of the inconsistencies stem from their negative experiences.

### **Conclusion**

When we look at Trinity College, it is clear there needs to be more communication between what Trinity is trying to offer students and how students perceive the curriculum. Trinity students need an understanding of the Second-Language Requirement, and this study presents to faculty and educators that this lack of communication exists. Current research extensively

analyzes what classroom and teaching practices promote effective language acquisition. However, in this research, we understand that student motivation to learn the language significantly changes what students retain. Future research may be done to bridge factors that inhibit student motivation and second-language learning at Trinity College, beginning with communication between students and the administration.

This study was not without limitations. The time constraint of one semester, or four months, to complete the study inhibited the benefits a longitudinal study could offer. Having a more extended study would permit time to gather more interview participants. There were nine participants, which is not the best representation of the Trinity population because it only consists of a few students and does not demographically represent the Trinity student population. However, this study is meant to begin conversations about curriculum requirements at higher education institutions.

### **Recommendations**

I recommend reconsidering the intent of Trinity's SLR. We can consider the relevance of prioritizing knowledge of other cultures over language fluency. Learning a new language is an impressive skill that takes much work. Students who want to learn something other than a second language because of its difficulty should still consider the importance of exposure to other cultures. It may be considered to better align the courses with the goals presented in Trinity's Bulletin by thinking about what level of skills students must demonstrate to achieve them.

Additionally, since Trinity states students will gain many benefits from the SLR, the students who get to opt out of the requirement will miss out on this experience. On one side, Trinity students are expressing a need for the SLR to develop the language skills and cultural

awareness they seek. At the same time, the students who get to opt out will not be a part of the benefits presented by attending these language classes like professor and peer relationships. These are all ideas meant to spark conversations about the future of SLR on Trinity's campus. Park's study showed student perceptions of the Second-Language Requirement when it was newly re-introduced to Trinity's curriculum. This study shows that students still have differing perceptions of the requirement. Although participants mainly supported the requirement, my study raises the question of how the SLR can be transformed to be most effective through language instruction.

### Bibliography

- Chandra, Y., & Shang, L. (2019). Inductive coding. *Qualitative Research Using R: A Systematic Approach*, 91-106. doi:10.1007/978-981-13-3170-1\_8
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers college record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Li, C. (2009). [A research on Second language acquisition and college English teaching](#). *English Language Teaching*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n4p57>
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (1st ed.). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Park, Sunny, "Trinity's Second-Language Requirement: Focusing on students' perspectives". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2009. Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/225>
- Price, J., & Gascoigne, C. (2006). Current perceptions and beliefs among incoming college students towards foreign language study and language requirements. *Foreign Language Annals*, 39(3), 383–394. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2006.tb02895.x>
- Schütz, R. (2007). [Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition](#). *English made in Brazil*, 2(2), 2007.
- Second-language requirement. *Language and Culture Studies*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://www.trincoll.edu/language-culture-studies/second-language-requirement/>
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44. doi:10.1177/1077800402008001003

TC bulletin 2021-2022 (2021, August 31). Retrieved December 16, 2022, from

<https://www3.trincoll.edu/bulletin/>

## Appendix A

*Google Form, First page:*

Informed Consent to Participate in Student Experience with the Second-language Requirement.

The purpose of this research study is to gain generalizable knowledge of Trinity's second-language requirement. Participants will be asked to answer open-ended questions about their personal experiences during an interview. We estimate that this will require 30 minutes of your time.

This study is meant to benefit students by presenting perceptions on the requirement that may inspire someone involved in the program at Trinity (or elsewhere) to make a change, but that is not the purpose. Although I will put systems in place to protect each participant's identity there is still risk involved. The collection of individually identifiable data could result in embarrassment or other personal harm due to a breach of confidentiality.

To compensate you for participating in this study, you will receive a \$5 gift card to the Underground.

To participate in this study you must be a student required to take a second language at Trinity. If you would like to participate in this research study, please continue with this form. You will be asked a couple of questions and then sign up for a date and time to set up an interview.

*Next page, Background questions:*

- Name
- Class year
- Email
- What is your declared major and minor?
- What is your box number?
- Have you completed your second-language requirement? Y/N
- What language did you choose to complete the second-language requirement?
- Please list all course names with the corresponding semester and year that you have taken, and/or are currently taking towards the fulfillment of the requirement. Example: Spanish 101 taken Spring 2021.

*Next page, Consent form:*

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I am free to stop or withdraw my participation at any time, without any penalty.

I understand that all of my responses in this study are completely confidential, and will be used only for research purposes. If I have any questions about this study or want more information, I am free to contact:

Alberlis Hernandez at [alberlis.hernandez@trincoll.edu](mailto:alberlis.hernandez@trincoll.edu), her research supervisor Britney Jones at [britney.jones@trincoll.edu](mailto:britney.jones@trincoll.edu), or the Trinity College IRB administrator at [irb@trincoll.edu](mailto:irb@trincoll.edu).

Electronic signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Next page, Sign up for a day/time to have interview:*

Meeting will be on **ZOOM**.

Please check what times of the week you are available. Remember the interview will not take longer than 30 minutes. After submitting this Google Form I will contact you within 48 hours to confirm a possible date.

*\*\*All signed forms will remain confidential. Participants may request a blank form if desired.*

## Appendix B

Day of the interview bring:

- A blank, spaced-out copy of the interview questions to take notes
- Background Information sheet (print out their responses from the Google form)
- Phone or recorder to record the interview with

Introduction:

For my educational studies senior project, I am interviewing Trinity students of the Class of 2023 and 2024 to learn more about your perceptions of the second-language requirement. I will be asking open-ended questions on how you experienced this requirement in relation to your time at Trinity.

This study is meant to benefit students by presenting perceptions on the requirement that may inspire someone involved in the program at Trinity (or elsewhere) to make a change, but that is not the purpose. Although I will put systems in place to protect each participant's identity there is still risk involved. The collection of individually identifiable data could result in embarrassment or other personal harm due to a breach of confidentiality.

To compensate you for participating in this study, you will receive a \$5 gift card to the Underground.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary, and you are free to stop or withdraw at any time, without any penalty.

I would like your permission to record your interview, and I will NOT use your name or any identifying details when typing up the transcript or sharing our final results. May I start recording?

[If yes, then start the recording, and ask:]

Would you please say aloud that you've agreed to be recorded for this anonymous interview?

To start,

*Questions:*

Prior experiences in language acquisition:

- Have you taken a language course prior to Trinity?
  - When and what language?
- Talk about your prior experiences with language courses
  - How were your classes?
  - Was your experience overall positive? Why? If not, why?
  - To what extent do you feel comfortable writing, speaking and reading (x)?

Language courses at Trinity:

- Talk about your experiences taking (x) courses at Trinity
  - How was the instructor?
  - Your opinions regarding homework load?
  - Did you enjoy taking these courses? Why or why not?



Proficiency:

- Do you feel confident speaking, writing, and reading in (x)? Why or why not?
- Have you used (x) outside of the classroom? If so, can you give me examples of a time you did so?
- How do you define proficiency in a language? Would you say you gained proficiency in (x) *because* you took these courses at Trinity?

Reasons:

- Why did you choose (x) as the language of choice to fulfill your second-language requirement?
- How greatly did the study abroad program influence this choice?
  - If the interviewee studied abroad: How helpful were the courses in aiding proficiency in the country you studied abroad?
- Do you plan to take more courses in (x) post-grad? Why or why not?

Second-language requirement:

- Why do you believe Trinity made taking second-language courses a requirement?
- Would you have taken a language course at Trinity if it was not required?
- What would you say you gained from having taken the language courses/ from learning (x)? Why or why not?
- Given today's political and social climate, would you say it is relevant to learn a second language? Why or why not?
- Do you think taking a second-language course should be a requirement or an elective course at Trinity? Why or why not?

Closing remarks:

- Lastly, Is there anything about these topics that I didn't ask you that you would like to share?

Thank you so much for your time! It has been a pleasure speaking with you today. I can keep you updated on this research and send you a final copy of my work if you are interested. I will also reach out to you if I need to clarify any points that you've shared as I begin analyzing the data. Is that okay with you? Thanks again.

## Appendix C

Parent Code	Child Code
<p>Experience (EX)</p> <p>This code includes instances when interviewees express specific feelings when talking about their experience in a second-language course taken</p>	<p>Positive (P) - this code includes positive emotions at a course prior to Trinity</p> <p>Negative (N) - this code includes negative emotions at a course prior to Trinity</p> <p>Indifferent (I) - this code includes indifferent emotions at a course prior to Trinity</p> <p>Positive (TP) - this code includes positive emotions at a Trinity course</p> <p>Negative (TN) - this code includes negative emotions at a Trinity course</p> <p>Indifferent (TI) - this code includes indifferent emotions at a Trinity course</p>

<p>Comfort Level (CL)</p> <p>This code includes the interviewee's comfort level engaging in the language of choice</p>	<p>High comfort (H) - student is highly comfortable speaking, writing and reading in language pre-Trinity class</p> <p>Low/No Comfort (L) - student is not comfortable speaking, writing and reading in language pre-Trinity class</p> <p>Higher Comfort (TH) - student's comfortness speaking, writing and reading in language increased after completing SLR</p> <p>Same Comfort (TS) - student's comfortness speaking, writing, and reading in language remained stagnant after completing SLR</p> <p>Lower Comfort (TL) - student's comfortness speaking, writing, and reading in language decreased after completing SLR</p>
--	---

<p>Exist (ET)</p> <p>Reasons interviewees understand why the SLR exists at Trinity</p>	<p>Globalization (GL) - the SLR increases students understanding on international affairs</p> <p>Cultural Awareness (CA) - SLR exposes students to different cultures</p> <p>Resume (RE) - the SLR gives students a language skill that can be included in their resume/ be used to increase their candidacy in the job market</p> <p>Liberal Arts Education (LA) - the SLR is part of a well-rounded education that is meant to happen in a liberal arts school</p>
--	--

<p>Choice (CH)</p> <p>Students reasons behind the language chosen to complete SLR</p>	<p>Study Abroad (SA) - interest in study abroad program influenced this choice</p> <p>Familiar (FA) - the interviewee is most familiar with the language they chose</p> <p>Hometown (HT) - the interviewee chose a language that most populates their hometown</p> <p>Family (FM) - the interviewee chose a language spoken by family members that they wanted to learn more of</p>
<p>Support (ST)</p> <p>Feelings behind whether SLR should remain a requirement or become an elective</p>	<p>Support (S) - SLR should remain a requirement</p> <p>Oppose (O) - SLR should be an elective</p>