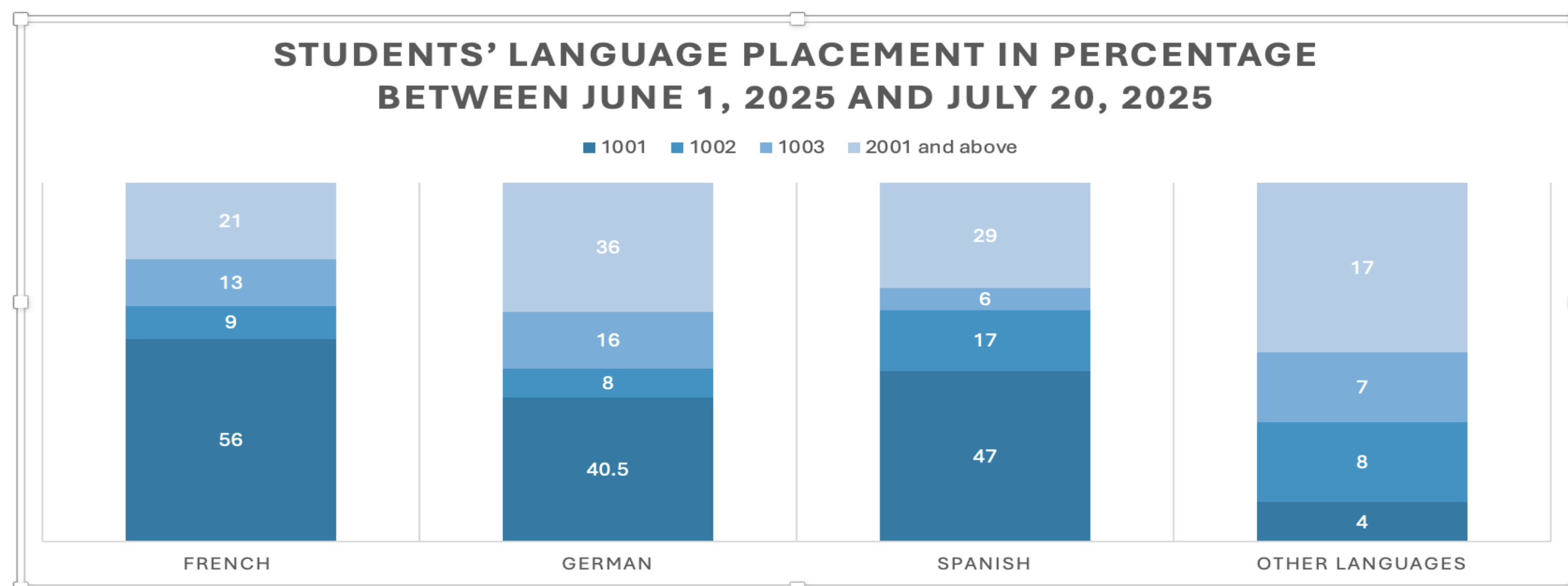


BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

- The Center for World Languages and Cultures (CWLC) oversees the First-Year Language Program (FYLP) at DU. The first-year language sequence comprises three terms of elementary language instruction for beginners.
- The CWLC offers the beginning sequence in 9 languages, serving 750-800 students per quarter.
- The FYLP can fulfill the language requirement for DU undergraduate students. Students interested in continuing in a language they have studied before take an online placement test.
- In French, German, and Spanish -the most commonly-taught languages in the U.S. secondary education - most students place in the FYLP. For other languages (Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Russian), the incoming students are evenly split between the FYLP and the 2000 levels.



- In the 2025 General Education Report, Colby shares that DU students ranked languages in the top 3 most valuable, meaningful, and impactful components of the Common Curriculum between 2018 and 2024.

Rank	Change (2018)	Common Curriculum Attribute
1	=	First-Year Seminar (FSEM 1111)
2	=	Writing and Rhetoric (WRIT 1122, 1622, 1133, 1533, 1733)
3	=	Foreign Language
4	=	Analytical Inquiry: Society and Culture (e.g., many courses in COMN, HIST, PHIL)
5	↑	Scientific Inquiry: The Natural and Physical World (e.g., the three-term science sequence, BIOL 1220 or 1260; GEOG 1216)
6	↓	Scientific Inquiry: Society and Culture (e.g., PSYC 1001; MFJS 2210)
7	=	Advanced Seminar (ASEM)
8	=	Analytical Inquiry: The Natural and Physical World (e.g., MATH 1200, 1951, COMP 1201)

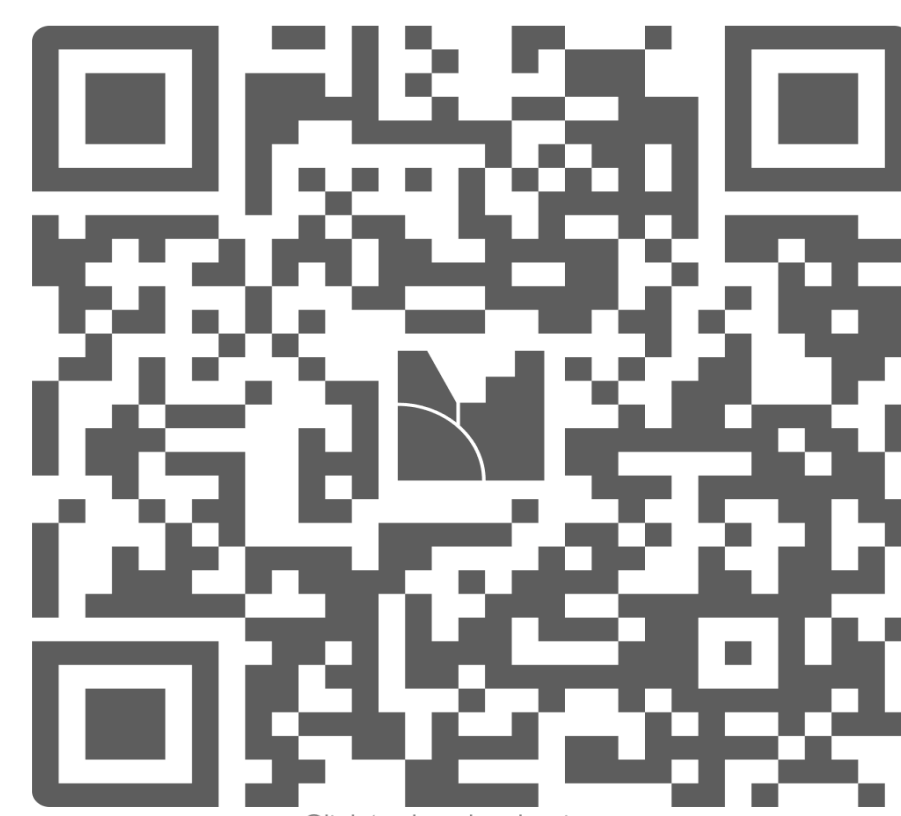
Table 9. Please rank the MOST valuable, meaningful, or impactful component of the Common Curriculum (general education) for you at DU. Ranks were averaged and compared to 2018 data

- Since many DU students participate in the FYLP and students value their language experience after completion of the language requirement, in comparison to other components of the Common Curriculum, one can ask what role(s) the FYLP plays in students' whole college and personal experience.

INTERACTIVE SECTION

Please tell us more in this two-minute survey!

1. Remember your experience as an undergraduate student? Did you have a language requirement at your alma mater? What was your take-away from this experience?
2. How would you rank your own undergraduate **language learning experience** in relation to belonging, well-being, and retention?
3. What do you think our current students would say about this?



LITERATURE REVIEW

- Postsecondary language programs face **enrollment and retention challenges**; first-year students arrive with varied experiences, beliefs, and expectations (Uebel et al., 2023; Knouse et al., 2021).
- Students often enter with generally positive attitudes toward their language studies but those attitudes can decline without targeted support. Prior exposure, travel, and course level influence attitude trajectories (Knouse et al., 2021).
- Many **students position themselves with low agency in language learning**; understanding learner biographies can reveal opportunities to foster agency and multilingual competence (Pirhonen, 2022; Tse, 2000).
- Teaching subjective culture and intercultural sensitivity intentionally (DMIS framework) supports deeper learning beyond “products” of culture (Durocher, 2007).
- **First-year experiences influence belonging, wellbeing, retention and academic success** — all relevant for language program vitality. (Trautwein & Bosse, 2017; Knoesen & Naudé, 2018; Uebel et al., 2023)
- **Beliefs are discursive and variable by language**; many students adopt dependent positions (less agentic); promoting action and attribute repertoires supports agency (Pirhonen, 2022).
- Deep culture instruction matters: tasks focused on subjective culture and reflection (vs. only products) better move students toward intercultural sensitivity (Durocher, 2007).
- Student perceptions & autobiographies offer rich data on **motivations and barriers**—useful for tailoring recruitment and retention (Tse, 2000).
- **First-year experience factors** (belonging, mental health, orientation support) **strongly affect persistence and engagement across disciplines**, including languages (Trautwein & Bosse, 2017; Knoesen & Naudé, 2018).
- **Program-level strategies** (curriculum redesign, certificates, institutional partnerships) are effective when contextually aligned (Uebel et al., 2023).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do students' mindsets about languages evolve after completing the first-year language sequence?
2. How does participation in the FYLP contribute to students' sense of belonging within their first-year College experience at DU?
3. How does participation in the FYLP contribute to students' well-being within their first-year College experience at DU?
4. How effective is the FYLP in motivating students to continue on with their college studies at DU?

METHODS & MATERIALS

- The study will use mixed-method approach.
- All 1001 students in the 9 languages offered at DU will be sent a survey in week 2 of the quarter (pre-test) and at week 10 of 1003.
- We are going to use different scales to collect data:
 - Sense of belonging: SBS (Mellinger and Park) and SOBI (Hagerty et al.)
 - Psychological Well-Being: Ryff's scale (Ryff and Corey)
 - Academic motivation: AMS (Vallerant et al.)
 - Students' mindsets regarding languages: LMI (Lou and Noels)

HYPOTHESES

- It is expected that students enrolled in critical languages will rate their experience in the FYLP higher than their counterparts in the most commonly taught languages. They are likely to have stronger motivation (from personal commitment to bonding with the same instructor over a three-quarter sequence) and develop further confidence in their abilities. They are also likely to develop stronger community bonds, having the same classmates and instructor throughout the year. These would likely positively affect students' well-being and sense of belonging.
- It is expected that students' mindset toward language learning is initially not always positive since it is associated with a requirement for which students feel they have no agency. It is hoped that by the end of the first-year sequence, students' mindset will have changed.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Can we connect this component of the first-year experience to the 4D framework?
- Does the transfer students' experience – who may not complete their language requirement in the first two years of their college studies – differ from the students who took their language at DU in their first year of study?

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