

## **Investigating the Foreign Language Needs of Professional School Students in International Affairs: A Case Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

On-going demographic changes and increasing globalization have challenged professional schools to prepare students for the plurilinguistic and pluricultural realities of the workplace both within and across national boundaries. Given these evolving workplace realities, professional schools may need to re-assess the degree to which their students' career needs are being met by existing language programs, so that policy and resources can be adjusted accordingly. The current inquiry reports on a large-scale assessment designed to investigate the foreign language needs of students in the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University and to evaluate the degree to which these needs are being addressed. Recognizing that different stakeholders may have opposing perceptions of foreign language needs, this study utilized a conceptual model of needs assessment that surveyed multiple sources of data within and across a variety of stakeholder groups. These perceived needs were then examined and compared. The findings showed a disparity among the needs of the professional school students, foreign language instruction, and SIPA's language policy. While these results were not entirely unexpected, they were highlighted by evidence from the different perspectives surveyed. The model of needs assessment used in this study served as an invaluable framework for examining the different dimensions of foreign language needs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On-going demographic changes and increasing globalization have challenged professional schools to prepare students for the plurilinguistic and pluricultural realities of the workplace both

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within and across national boundaries (Brecht & Walton, 2003; Kennedy & Weiner, 2003; McGinnis, 2003). However, it is not uncommon to find a serious disconnect between what professional school students need and expect from foreign language study and what they receive, when foreign language study is administered by language departments in the larger institution (Bousquet, 2003; Davidson, 2001; Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; Swales, 1990). Given the evolving workplace realities of its graduates, professional schools may need to re-assess the degree to which their students' career needs are or are not being met by existing language programs. The results of this reassessment could conceivably lead to much-needed readjustments in policy, practices, perceptions, and resources on the one hand, and the creation of interdisciplinary mechanisms for collaboration between language-related programs and the professional schools on the other.

Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)<sup>3</sup> has recently initiated a re-evaluation of its efforts to provide language training to students pursuing a career in international affairs. SIPA offers a program of instruction leading towards a Master's Degree in International Affairs (MIA), designed to prepare globally competent graduates for careers in government, business, and international organizations. Aside from a core curriculum focusing on international politics and management, and special courses revolving around a regional concentration (e.g., Africa) and/or a functional concentration (e.g., human rights), the MIA program has a foreign language (FL) requirement that can be satisfied by being a native speaker of a language other than English, by passing a FL proficiency exam, or by passing an intermediate-level language course with a minimum grade of B. Language training is typically taken in the language departments alongside undergraduates.

Over the years, serious concerns have been raised at SIPA regarding FL study for students in the MIA program. Some concerns have revolved around the FL requirement itself, and whether it is excessive given the intensity of the MIA curriculum, whether the University offers courses in the full range of languages needed by students, and whether professional students can easily enroll in the undergraduate courses offered. Other concerns relate to whether the courses adequately equip students to communicate effectively in contexts that graduates are likely to encounter in their careers. This latter concern gives rise to debates within language departments regarding the separation of language learning from the study of literature, and the concomitant need to prepare communicative language teachers rather than prepare teachers of literature (Davidson, 2001). It also questions the degree to which professional school students have access to specialized language training that pertains to their discipline (Bousquet, 2003). Finally, concerns have been raised regarding the proficiency exams and the inferential validity of using the results from these exams as a basis for exempting students from language study.

In developing a coherent response to calls for higher ultimate levels of foreign language proficiency for professional school graduates (Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; Mallone, Rifkin, Christian, & Johnson, 2001) or for adjustments to the language curriculum (Byrnes, 2001), a clear and comprehensive understanding of the needs, both linguistic and non-linguistic, as perceived by all stakeholders, is required. In other words, curriculum planners must acknowledge the foreign language needs expressed by graduates in their career contexts, and they must

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address suggestions on how language instruction might better match the actual language use needs. However, they must also understand how students need to use the target language in their professional contexts and to what degree the students' perceived needs, interests, wants, and expectations are being addressed by the FL program. Equally important are the opinions of future employers and faculty members in the professional schools regarding their perceptions of the language needs of SIPA students. Lastly, we cannot ignore the opinions of university administrators who will allocate financial support for these programs, or the opinions of language teachers who might be expected to retool their current practices to accommodate new demands. In sum, a program of reform begins with an evaluation of the current language teaching situation, an appraisal of the ways in which the target language will be used, an assessment of the needs, wants, interests, and expectations of the learners, and an understanding of both how the perceptions of major stakeholders interact and how the collective views for change can be addressed with the available resources.

The current study presents the first two phases of large-scale needs assessment that focuses on the FL needs of SIPA students at Columbia University. The goal of this study is to identify the foreign language needs of SIPA students as expressed by various stakeholders, and to explore whether or not these stakeholders believe SIPA's current foreign language policy, together with language instruction opportunities, are sufficient to prepare them for the linguistic and cultural demands expected of professionals in international affairs.

## Assessing Foreign Language Needs

Language needs assessment describes procedures designed to gather and analyze information on the target language (TL) needs of a specific group of learners in an existing or proposed setting so that inferences about the curriculum can be drawn and informed decisions made. Needs assessment typically involves the identification of stakeholders who can help language program planners identify features of the TL use situations that can inform language curricula and teaching materials (Brown, 1995). These assessments have traditionally focused on the identification of situations, tasks, and related linguistic features within a specific TL use domain.

Focusing on situations in which the target language is used reveals the *target needs* in the most obvious and objective sense of the term. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify target needs as *necessities* and distinguish *necessities* from *wants*, or what learners believe they need. Hutchinson and Waters argue that while wants are more subjective, both necessities and wants must be considered if we wish to account for the learners' motivation to learn. Mackay and Bosquet (1981) further "distinguish *real, current needs*, or what students actually need the language for, from *future, hypothetical needs*, or what students may want the language for at some time in the future" (p. 6). Mackay and Bosquet also separate current and future needs from both *student desires*, or what students hope to be able to do with the language, and *teacher-created needs*, or what teachers ascribe as important. Thus, the notion of needs is complex, extending beyond a simple examination of how the target language will be used in some target language context.

More recently, the linguistic notion of needs has been broadened further to account for other types of educational or socio-political information. In this respect, language needs assessment also comprises information on the characteristics of learners (i.e., their goals,

attitudes, motivations, expectations, and learning styles), the characteristics of the learning situation (i.e., the course objectives, class activities, assessments, and desired outcomes), and the characteristics of the means (i.e., the human and material resources, organizational architecture, and policies associated with language learning).

Although the goals of individual needs assessments may differ considerably, needs appraisals share several characteristics. They are situation-centered or context-adaptive in that each assessment is devised with reference to a specific context that defines the parameters of the study, the collection of data, the analyses, the inferences that can be drawn from the results, and the decisions that the results can affect (Lynch, 1990). Needs assessments are also learner-centered both in their purpose and in procedure (e.g., Berwick, 1989; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001; Richterich, 1983); they are pragmatic in their aim “to specify what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium” of the TL (Robinson, 1991, as cited in Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1997, p. 3); and they are systematic in information collection (Berwick, 1989; Brown, 2001)—even though the level of systematicity required may vary in accordance with the purpose and context of the investigation.

Various types of needs analyses have been proposed, each approaching the task of identifying language needs from a different perspective. Hutchinson and Waters (1985) distinguished *ends*, or “what the students are expected to cope with” in the target context, from “what the students require in order to cope” (p. 178). Hutchinson and Waters’ *learning needs analysis* focused on the *means*, where learner needs are derived from personal, rather than from professional information (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1997). A *learning needs analysis*, therefore, surveys the learners’ beliefs about their language learning goals, attitudes, motivations, expectations, and learning styles (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Focusing on the *ends* constitutes a *target language use situation analysis*. This involves the analysis of situations in which the TL will be used. It considers what learners will have to do with the TL outside of the classroom. It is characterized as a description of the characteristics of communication in terms of language contexts, themes, functions, and forms, so that long-range curricular goals can be determined (Chambers, 1980). The domain of TL use needs can be broken down into: (a) occupational needs, relating to professional and academic needs; (b) interactive needs, relating to social relationships established via the TL; (c) transactional needs, relating to the use of language for information transmission; and (d) cultural/affective needs, relating to learner beliefs and interests (Brown & Yule, 1983; Tudor, 1996). TL use situation analysis is particularly useful in instances where learners have concrete and articulated objectives for learning the language such as for professional purposes.

The extent to which a learning situation addresses the gaps between what the learner already knows, feels, and is willing to do, and what the learner needs to know in the TL use situation entails an analysis of the type of instruction being offered to the learners. This type of analysis, known as a *present learning situation*, or *deficiency analysis* (Jordan, 1997; West, 1994), diagnoses particular linguistic challenges to learners as they relate to language learning goals. Present learning situation analyses also show how learning objectives are articulated and how instructional priorities are set (West, 1994).

Finally, a *means analysis* examines those factors that impede or facilitate curriculum implementation or change. A means analysis is not so much concerned with the language or the learner per se, but with the contextual variables of the learning/teaching environment (Jordan, 1997; Richterich, 1983). In other words, it takes into account how cultural, political,

administrative, and institutional factors of an organization impact the allocation of resources and affect the (re-)formulation of educational language policy.

The information derived from these different types of needs analyses has led to the development of a comprehensive model of language needs assessment used to examine the foreign language needs of SIPA students in the current study. This model will be described in full later in the paper.

## The Current Study

In an attempt to better understand the FL needs of MIA students as viewed by all major stakeholders, a formal needs assessment was performed. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the context in which FL learning takes place at SIPA?
2. What are the FL learner needs? In other words, with respect to languages, what are the students' goals, attitudes, and motivations?
3. What are the TL use requirements? In other words, what do MIA students need to know to communicate effectively in a FL in their career contexts?
4. How can the present learning situation be characterized? In other words, what is the nature of FL instruction, and to what extent do the courses prepare MIA students to communicate effectively in their career contexts?
5. How can the means be characterized? In other words, does the SIPA FL requirement reflect the level of FL competency students will need in their future careers? And, to what degree are the current FL instructional practices a reflection of SIPA's commitment to meeting the FL needs of their graduates?

## Overview of the Study

The present study reports on the first two phases of a three-phase investigation of the FL needs of MIA students. The conceptual framework draws on and expands upon previous work in language needs analysis. It assumes a broad definition of needs to include Hutchison and Waters' (1987) objective notion of necessities as well as their subjective notion of wants, which subsumes *real, current need; future, hypothetical needs; and student desires*. *Teacher-created needs* are also taken into account. In order to explore language needs in this broad sense, the approach used in this study is multidimensional in that several needs domains were examined both within and across a number of stakeholder groups. Data were triangulated to provide our best understanding of the collective views.

The purpose and audience of the assessment were first established by means of a *contextual analysis*, which sought both to understand the context in which the assessment was taking place and to identify those stakeholders whose views should be surveyed. Then, a *learner situation analysis* was performed in order to determine what learners already knew, felt, desired, and were willing to do to learn a FL given their other commitments. This was followed by a *TL use situation analysis* which sought to identify what MIA students would ultimately need to

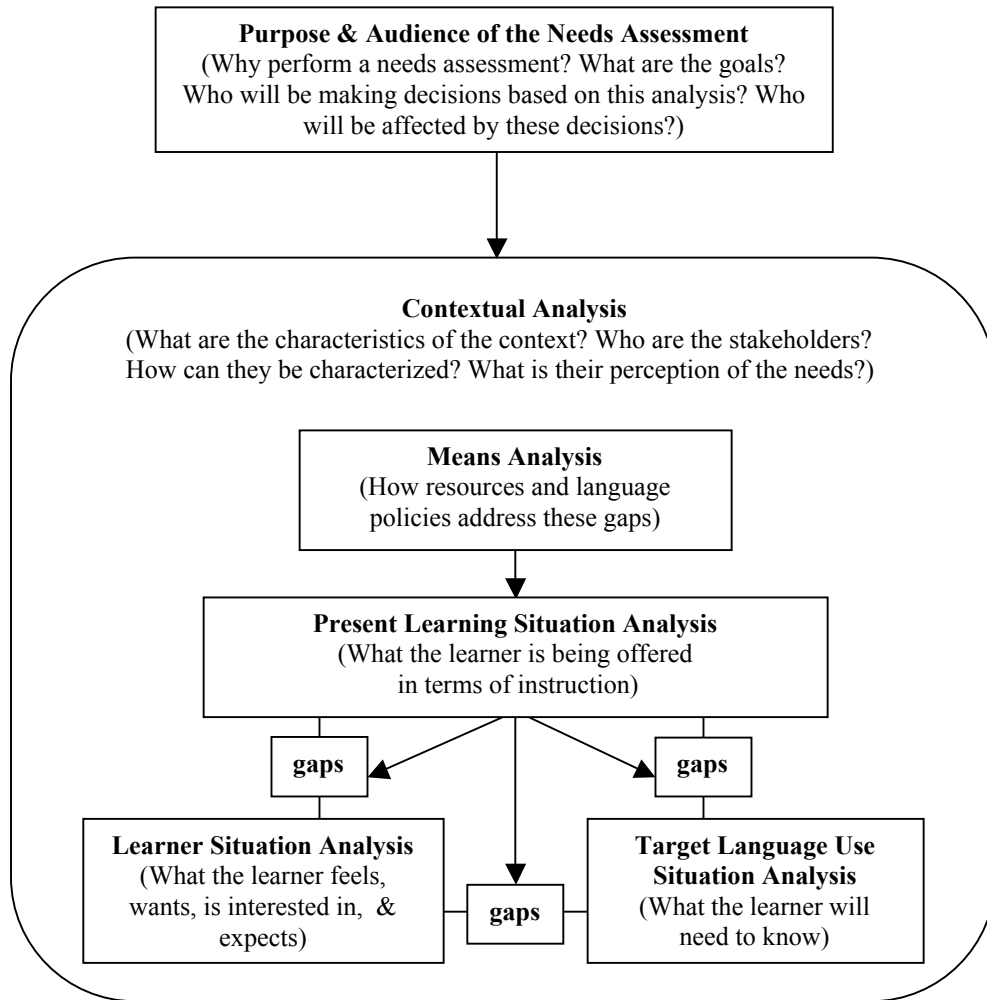
know to use the FL for communication purposes in their careers. The learner situation analysis and the TL use situation analysis, along with the contextual analysis, constituted three dimensions of the SIPA needs assessment project.

A chasm between what learners feel and expect and what language they need to function in an international context should ideally be bridged by satisfying SIPA's FL requirement. To determine whether this gap was indeed bridged by the requirement, we examined a selected number of language classes offered by the University and SIPA's FL proficiency exams, as the courses and exams represented both ways in which non-international students could satisfy the FL requirement. This fourth study dimension comprised the *present learning situation analysis*.

Gaps may also exist between what learners expect and want in FL instruction (learner situation) and what FL instruction actually provides (present learning situation), as well as between the characteristics of language instruction (present learning situation) and the language knowledge and skills needed to function in the target language used context (TL use situation).

Once the gaps among the learner situation, the TL use situation, and the present learning situation are identified, recommendations for bridging these gaps can be made. Of these three dimensions, recommendations can be offered only with respect to the present learning situation (i.e., the courses and proficiency exams). However, as University courses and proficiency exams reflect and are constrained by the policies and practices of SIPA and the language departments, a *means analysis* was undertaken to identify what policies and/or practices might need readjusting to address gaps between the learner situation and TL use situation, as well as to address gaps that exist between the present learning situation and both the learner situation and the TL use situation. Figure 1 presents the five dimensions of the study framework.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Conceptual Framework for the Needs Assessment**



Given the goals of the current study, several methods were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, following Mackay and Bosquet (1981). Also, descriptive, interpretative, and statistical analyses were employed.

Phase 1 identified the purpose and audience of the language needs appraisal and sought an understanding of the study context--SIPA. Data sources included documents, analyses of proficiency exams, observations of a SIPA core course and an intermediate foreign language class, and a textual analysis of SIPA course material. Phase 2 involved separate interview protocols for each stakeholder group. Phase 3, not reported in this paper, involved the use of customized, on-line questionnaires for each constituent group.

An overview of the research design appears in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Research Design**  
(Adapted from Purpura et al., 2003, p. 19-20)

<b>Phase 1: Contextual Analysis</b>		
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Analyses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context of Study and Means (FL policy &amp; practices)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalogues</li> <li>• FL Enrollment Records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretative</li> <li>• Statistical</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present learning situation</li> </ul>	Existing Documents & Records  Language Tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proficiency (Spanish, French, German)</li> </ul> Language Class Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediate Korean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> <li>• Interpretative</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target language use situation</li> </ul>	Content Class Observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIPA Content Class: International Economics II</li> </ul> Textual Analysis of a SIPA Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Packet for Required Content Course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretative</li> <li>• Form-function analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2: Interview Surveys</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner situation analysis</li> <li>• Target language use situation analysis</li> <li>• Present learning situation analysis</li> <li>• Means analysis</li> </ul>	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured protocols for all stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretative</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3: Questionnaire Surveys*</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner situation analysis</li> <li>• Target language use situation analysis</li> <li>• Present learning situation analysis</li> <li>• Means analysis</li> </ul>	Questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed items</li> <li>• Open items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical</li> <li>• Interpretative</li> </ul>

\* Not reported in this paper



## **PHASE 1 – CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

Phase 1 examined the context in which FL learning took place at SIPA. Non-survey information regarding FL learning was gathered and examined. The database included: (a) existing documents and records, (b) selected FL proficiency exams, (c) observation reports of a SIPA core course, as well as an intermediate FL class, and (d) a textual analysis of an article from a SIPA course text.

### **Existing Documents and Records**

#### ***Purpose***

Documents and existing records were collected to obtain information regarding SIPA, the MIA program, and its FL requirement as well as to identify stakeholder groups for Phases 2 and 3.

#### ***Method***

***Materials.*** The following documents and records were reviewed.

**TABLE 2**  
**SIPA Documents and Records Reviewed**  
**(Adapted from Purpura et al., 2003, p. 22)**

**University/SIPA Program Bulletins**

University Bulletin, School of International & Public Affairs, 1998-2000 & 2000-2002  
Crossroads, University SIPA Program Bulletin Supplement  
University Bulletin, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences  
Undergraduate University Bulletin  
East Asian Institute, Annual Report 1999-2000  
Pamphlet for the Center for Israel & Jewish Studies, Spring & Fall 2000  
Pamphlet for African-American Studies, M.A.

**University Language Department Documents**

Pamphlets from Selected Language Departments  
M.A. in Slavic Cultures  
Graduate Study, The Department of Germanic Languages  
M.A. in Romance Languages

**SIPA Content Course Materials**

Course Syllabi, Website & Materials Packet  
Conceptual Foundations of International Politics  
Reading: Sagan, S., & Waltz, K. (1997). *The spread of nuclear weapons: A debate*. New York: W.W. Norton.

**SIPA Career Materials**

List of End-Users, SIPA Office of Career Services  
Annual Reports on End-Users from Language Resource Center

**Foreign Language Enrollment Records**

Database of SIPA students enrolled in FL classes in the University Community (1994-1999)

*Analysis.* All print materials were examined, and information regarding the MIA program, the FL requirement, and the FL course offerings was summarized. FL enrollment data of SIPA students from 1994 to 1999 were submitted to a frequency analysis using SPSS Version 10.1 (SPSS Inc., 2001), and the language courses were rank ordered according to the enrollment statistics.

**Results**

*The MIA program of study.* SIPA began in 1946 as the School of International Affairs; it became the School of International and Public Affairs in 1977 when a second degree, the Master of Public Administration, was also offered. At the time of data collection, there were 42 administrators and approximately 220 faculty members, 51 of whom were full-time, at SIPA. Of the 1,112 SIPA students enrolled that year, 683 were in the MIA program.

The 54-point MIA program involves a core curriculum of international politics and management, a regional and/or functional concentration, a FL requirement, and electives. It aims to provide students preparing for careers in government, business, finance, media, the non-profit sector, and international organizations with a strong foundation in international affairs, economics, statistics, and quantitative analysis. The degree can be completed within four terms of full-time study.

**The FL requirement.** To ensure that students have achieved at least a high-intermediate level of FL proficiency, students must pass a proficiency exam or pass an upper intermediate-level FL course with a minimum grade of B. The language should be appropriate to the student's area of concentration; regional concentrations have their own separate requirements. Non-native speakers of English automatically satisfy the requirement.

**FL enrollment trends.** From 1994 to 1999, a total of 1,529 MIA students were enrolled in 34 different FL classes. Two enrollment trends emerged. First, there exists a sharp distinction between the languages most commonly studied by MIA students and those least studied. The two most commonly studied languages, French and Spanish, were chosen by 20.0% and 19.0% of the students respectively, while 12 foreign languages (e.g., Tibetan, Swedish, Sanskrit, and Zulu) were chosen by less than one percentage of the MIA students. Second, some students who chose to study one of the two most commonly studied languages showed a tendency to go beyond the requirement by taking advanced level courses.

**SIPA constituents.** Current MIA students, MIA alumni, FL faculty, SIPA content faculty, SIPA administrators, and end-users (i.e., those who hire SIPA graduates) were identified as those from whom both interview and questionnaire data should be elicited. Stakeholder identification was driven by the expanded notion of needs and the multidimensional framework adopted here; stakeholder groups varied with respect to the dimension(s) of information to which each could contribute.

## Foreign Language Proficiency Exams

### *Purpose*

FL proficiency exams were examined to ascertain the theoretical definition of FL proficiency underlying the exams and to identify the language competencies needed for exemption from language study.

### *Method*

**Materials.** The German, Spanish, and French Proficiency Exams were collected.

**Analysis.** Each exam was analyzed in terms of its purpose and design, and the degree to which it appeared *useful* (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) for its intended purpose. In addition, given the high stakes nature of the exams and the potential consequences that failing the proficiency exam could

have in terms of time and money, technical documentation in support of the reliability and validity of the exams was sought.

## **Results**

**Purpose and test designs.** The three exams all defined proficiency in terms of lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and reading comprehension. All three exams also saw translation as a very important method of measuring proficiency. Only the French exam included writing. Instructions for the Spanish and French exams were given in English. None of the exams measured listening or speaking ability.

**Test usefulness.** The three exams shared a similar purpose—to measure the FL proficiency of MIA students so that inferences from the scores could be used to make language study exemption decisions. Among the three exams, the constructs being measured included lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge, reading ability, writing ability (only the French exam), reading ability through translation, and the ability to translate from one language to another. The use of translation to measure L2 proficiency is questionable given that translation tasks may be more related to the ability to translate than they are to the ability to write or speak in another language (see Lado, 1961 and Oller, 1979, for arguments for and against using translation as a measure of language proficiency).

As no technical manuals exist for these proficiency exams, no documentation regarding the reliability or validity of these exams was available.

Nonetheless, given the purpose of these exams, all three measures were found to be lacking. The German Proficiency Exam was designed to measure lexical and grammatical knowledge by means of discrete-point items presented in isolation with minimal contextualization. The Spanish Proficiency Exam was designed to measure lexical knowledge, presenting students with English translation items, and synonyms/antonym items with no contextualization. This test was also intended to measure grammatical knowledge; however, as 19 of the 20 test items targeted verb forms, the content coverage for a proficiency test might be drawn into question. The French exam fared a little better in that grammatical knowledge was defined in terms of conjugation, style, grammar patterns, and *false friends*. However, none of the three exams provided a measure of the test-takers' implicit knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, where grammar and vocabulary are resources for communicating a variety of meanings in real time (Purpura, 2004).

In addition, as most of tasks used in these proficiency exams were multiple choice and translation-oriented, it is unlikely that the score-based inferences gleaned from these exam results could be used to infer language proficiency in international affairs contexts. Only a few of the reading passages in the exams utilized the kinds of readings professionals in international affairs might be expected to read. For further information on these exams, see Purpura et al. (2003).

## **Summary**

Based on an inspection of these exams, it was clear that proficiency assessment at SIPA is in need of attention. New language proficiency exams need to be developed and validated to ensure that exemption decisions based on inferences from test scores are empirically justified.

Finally, information on the general content of the exams, the format, the administration procedures, scoring, grading, technical material justifying the use of the test scores, and the tests' reliability and validity needs to be readily available to score users (e.g., students and administrators).

## **Classroom Observation**

### ***Purpose***

To gather information on FL instruction for SIPA students, a Beginning Japanese and an Intermediate Korean class were randomly selected for classroom observation. Since SIPA's foreign language requirement can be satisfied by passing an upper intermediate level language course with a grade of B or better, we report here on the Intermediate Korean class that was observed by a speaker of that language. This class represented a typical undergraduate language class, and the observation sought to obtain information regarding the focus of instruction, the content of instruction, the types of instructional activities, the class materials, the nature of student participation, and the targeted language points.

### ***Method***

***Procedure.*** Data were audio taped during a 65-minute Intermediate Korean class, and observation notes were taken.

***Materials.*** An observation protocol adapted from Nunan (1992) was used.

***Analysis.*** After the class, the audiotape and observation notes were compared and summarized.

### ***Results***

Intermediate Korean was taught by a native speaker of Korean; 23 students attended. Only Korean was used for communication. Instruction involved: discourse-based class activities; explicit, contextualized grammar instruction; and web-based materials. Table 3 summarizes the data from this class observation.

**TABLE 3**  
**Korean Class Observation Report**  
**(Adapted from Purpura et al., 2003, p. 46)**

<i>Class Activities</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Activity type</b> (What is the activity type, e.g., lecture, discussion, Q&A format, drill, role-play, or dictation?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities included lecture, pair work, and role-plays.</li> </ul>
<b>Participant organization</b> (Are students working as a whole class, in small groups, one-on-one, or in pairs?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The whole class worked with the instructor and in pairs.</li> <li>• A problem was posed, examples were put on board, Q&amp;A between the instructor and students, and between pairs followed.</li> <li>• Key points were written on blackboard each time they were introduced.</li> <li>• The instructor read conversations from the textbook, went over new words and expressions before pair work, and then role-plays took place using the key points.</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b> (Is the focus on form, function, discourse, or pragmatics?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to invite people to a birthday party.</li> <li>• Teaching points included: (a) Let's ____ (verb). Shall we ____ (verb)? (b) Verb inflections (c) I'm planning to do ____ (d) How to invite and how to accept (or refuse) invitations in socially appropriate ways.</li> </ul>
<b>Student modality</b> (Are students involved in listening, speaking, reading, writing, or combinations of these?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students volunteered for role-plays. One student issues an invitation and the other accepts or refuses it.</li> <li>• Students participated in pair work.</li> <li>• Class instruction was focused on reading, listening, and speaking.</li> <li>• Written homework was assigned.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b> (What types of materials are used, and what are their source and purpose?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A textbook was used to study basic conversations, new vocabulary, and role-plays.</li> </ul>

<i>Classroom Language</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Use of target language</b> (To what extent is the target language used?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The instructor was a native speaker of Korean.</li> <li>• Korean was used almost all of the time.</li> <li>• 23 students attended. The targeted linguistic expressions were actively used in pair work and role-plays.</li> </ul>
<b>Information gap</b> (To what extent is requested information predictable in advance?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When students did role-plays from their textbooks, responses were predictable. When the role-plays included the students' real life experiences, responses were not predictable.</li> </ul>
<b>Sustained speech</b> (Is discourse extended or restricted to a single sentence, clause, or word?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The entire instruction was discourse-based.</li> </ul>
<b>Reaction to code or message</b> (Does the interlocutor react to code or message?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The instructor corrected his students when they made mistakes in key expressions.</li> </ul>
<b>Incorporation of preceding utterance</b> (Does the speaker incorporate the preceding utterance into his/her contribution?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students answered questions based on their everyday lives. The instructor repeatedly used what the students said in order to emphasize the key points.</li> </ul>
<b>Discourse initiation</b> (Do learners have opportunities to initiate discourse?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the conversations in this class were discourse-based.</li> </ul>
<b>Relative restriction of linguistic form</b> (Does the teacher expect a specific form, or is there no expectation of a particular linguistic form?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most questions and answers used in class were related to the targeted expressions.</li> </ul>

### *Summary*

In this one class, it was noted that both grammatical and pragmatic aspects of communicative language ability were addressed. The focus of instruction was divided among the four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The linguistic structures were introduced and practiced in everyday situations only (i.e., a real-life transactional and interactional language domain). No SIPA-related content or themes were included to contextualize language study for SIPA students. In general, the class seemed to adopt a communicative language teaching approach, an observation that did not always hold for some other foreign language classes based on student and alumni interviews.

## **Content Class Observation**

### ***Purpose***

A content course at SIPA was observed to gather information on the types of topics typically treated in a required core course, and on the types of language needed to handle these topics. Although this class was conducted in English, it provided a glimpse into the kinds of language SIPA students might be expected to know if they had to use the FL to discuss SIPA-related content and, by extension, to communicate SIPA-related content in professional contexts. While this class may have appeared academic, we would argue that it is not that different from talks given at conferences or other professional venues.

The class, International Economics II, was observed with interest paid to the focus and content of instruction, specifically with regard to the type of class activities and materials utilized in this course. This class was also observed in order to identify the nature and structure of student participation, and the kind of language needed to fully participate in the class.

### ***Method***

***Procedure.*** A 90-minute class was audio taped, and observation notes were taken.

***Materials.*** An observation protocol adapted from Nunan (1992) was used.

***Analysis.*** After class, the audiotape and observation notes were compared and summarized.

### ***Results***

International Economics II was taught by a SIPA faculty member; 65 students were present. Table 4 summarizes the observation data.



**TABLE 4**  
**Content Class Observation Report**  
**(Adapted from Purpura et al., 2003, p. 49)**

<i>Class Activities</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Activity type</b> (What is the activity type, e.g., lecture, discussion?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities included lecture, problem-solving tasks, Q&amp;A, and discussion.</li> </ul>
<b>Participant Organization</b> (Are students working as a whole class, in small groups, one-on-one, or in pairs?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A problem was posed and an example put on the board; Q &amp; A between the instructor &amp; students and a mini-lecture followed.</li> <li>• Key points were written on blackboard each time they were introduced.</li> <li>• The instructor elicited discussion and questions from students and followed up with brief review lecture.</li> <li>• Students were presented problems related to material from the previous class, and responses were elicited.</li> <li>• Activities were designed for critical engagement with issues or problems raised in the text. The instructor posed hypothetical scenarios and elicited possible solutions.</li> <li>• The professor had students follow the discussion between intermittent explanations of the topics.</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b> (What is the focus of the class?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized knowledge of terms used in the business world was needed to participate. Topics included: inflation, the definition of money, liquidity, interest, financial crises, reserve ratio, the Federal Reserve, federal charters, fiscal vs. monetary policy, loss and gain, bonds, and discount rates in reserve ratio.</li> <li>• A wide range of lexico-grammatical resources was needed. Pragmatic acts included: questioning, answering, explaining, hypothesizing, exemplifying, clarifying, and arguing. Also, a specialized knowledge of the topic was needed to apply new concepts.</li> <li>• Students need to engage in problem-solving as a means of acquiring, elaborating, personalizing, and generalizing</li> </ul>
<b>Student modality</b> (What is the nature of student participation? Are students involved in listening, speaking, reading, writing, or combinations of these?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The professor set up a problem and proceeded to ask students questions.</li> <li>• Students asked 6 questions; the professor asked 15.</li> <li>• Students critically analyzed the issues or problems raised in the text or from the previous class.</li> <li>• Listening was the main activity with regards to the intermittent lecturing and Q&amp;A sessions.</li> </ul>

The problem-solving activities in this class placed extremely high topical, linguistic, social, and cognitive demands on the participants, raising fundamental questions about the level of FL proficiency needed by MIA students to fully engage in an academic discussion such as the

one observed or in a similar professional discussion in international affairs. This class observation also provided information for identifying content and task domains that could ultimately serve as a basis for the language proficiency exams and for specialized FL instruction designed to promote and reinforce a SIPA-content agenda.

### ***Summary***

Observing a required SIPA content course provided insights into the topical, linguistic, social, and cognitive resources needed to follow a required class in the core curriculum. If one assumes that these resources are generalizable to those needed for careers in international contexts, then serious questions arise as to the adequacy of the FL requirement at SIPA as it is currently articulated. This information supports claims and recommendations by numerous other researchers (e.g., Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; Mallone et al. 2003; McCarthy, 2003) on the need to require students to attain higher levels of foreign language proficiency so that they can operate in the language in a professional context.

## **Textual Analysis of a SIPA Reading**

### ***Purpose***

To further understand the target language use needs of MIA students, the investigation was extended beyond an examination of the interactional patterns of a SIPA classroom discussion to an examination of the types of readings SIPA students might encounter in professional contexts. Again, this reading was selected to give us an idea of the level of foreign language proficiency needed by SIPA students to read in a professional context.

### ***Method***

***Materials.*** The reading packet for Conceptual Foundations of International Politics, a first-year course in the core curriculum, was examined. The article under examination was entitled “Globalization and its Limits” by Wade (1994), and it explored the relationships between political power, social movements, and collective action.

***Analysis.*** To identify the language needed to read this article, a form-function analysis was performed. This provided information on the rhetorical structure of the essay and allowed for an examination of a corpus of language functions along with their related grammatical forms, so that rhetorical patterns in the data could be identified.

Finite clauses were identified and labeled for tense, aspect, modality, and voice; finally, the function of each clause was determined. An example of the coding system in the form-function analysis is presented in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**  
**Form-Function Analysis**  
**(Adapted from Purpura et al., 2003, p. 53)**

<b>Paragraph Function</b>	<b>Clause Function</b>	<b>Excerpts from Data</b>	<b>Grammatical Form</b>
<i>Para. 2, p.11</i>	Hypothetical assertion	It would not have occurred	Past unreal conditional
<i>Description</i>	Not coded	To ask what makes individuals engage	Non-finite
	Explication	Or rather, they would have posed	Past unreal conditional
	Concession	But although they paid	Simple past
	Contrast	were surprisingly modern	Simple past
	Not coded	In understanding	Non-finite
	Elaboration	As one (that is) rooted	Simple present/Passive
	Assertion	had a clear understanding	Simple past
	Not coded	In producing collective action	Non-finite
<b>Para. 2, p.11</b>	General truth	answered the question	Simple past
<i>Exemplification</i>	General truth	How individuals get involved	Simple present/passive
	Assertion	People will engage	Simple present/modal
	Assertion	He thought	Simple past
	Description	When their social class is	Simple present
	Explication	This meant	Simple past
	Cause	When capitalism had forced it	Past perfect/passive
	Effect	it lost the ownership	Simple past
	Effect	But developed the resources	Simple past
	Effect	Among these resources were	Simple past
	Cause	It was the rhythm	Simple past
	Elaboration	would pound	Present/modal
	Result	They would give it	Present/modal

The essay was analyzed by two independent coders with from 98% to 100% agreement at any level of analysis. Finally, patterns in the rhetorical structure of the essay as they relate to form-function mappings were identified.

## ***Results***

The present simple and simple past tenses were the most frequently occurring grammatical forms, and these co-occurred with the clausal functions of assertion and elaboration. This co-occurrence apparently related to the descriptive nature of the essay as it explored the relationship between political power and social movements. The text contained several elaborations involving multiple non-finite clauses and complex sentences. Also, extensive use was made of the logical connectors signaling contrast, concession, condition, addition, and cause/effect. Subordination, coordination, and lexical cohesion were also used in abundance. Therefore, comprehension required a very high level of language proficiency due to the complex nature of the clause structures.

On the paragraph level, most paragraphs began with a statement of general truth, an assertion, or a hypothetical assertion. This was typically followed by explication, exemplification, or elaboration. When explication was utilized, a result or effect ensued, and when exemplification occurred, one or more additional examples followed. Finally, when elaboration was used, it was often extended into a subsequent elaboration. Alternatively, elaboration was followed by a new assertion, and the cycle began again. These rhetorical patterns highlighted the density of the text, further reinforcing the notion that a high level of language ability and topical knowledge are needed to process texts of this kind in a non-native language.

## ***Summary***

The form-function analysis revealed several patterns in the essay, which contributed to understanding the language needed to process a text from a core SIPA course. On the grammatical level, students need to be thoroughly familiar with a wide range of grammatical forms in relation to potential for expressing literal and implied meanings (e.g., description, assertion). On a textual level, students need to recognize when a linear line of argumentation is elaborated with explication, exemplification, description, counter-argumentation, and cause/effect. In other words, assertions are not simply made, but justified and defended. Students need to have a high level of FL ability if they are expected to read these types of texts written in a FL. While hardly comprehensive, the linguistic information gleaned from this essay is likely to reflect the type of language in the domain of international affairs.

## **Summary of Phase 1**

Phase 1 served to situate FL learning for SIPA students in the broader context of the SIPA MIA program, its goals, and its requirements. In addition to providing context, which helped us to identify constituent groups for Phases 2 and 3, it provided information related to three components of the needs assessment: the present learning situation, the target language use situation, and the means.

The purpose of SIPA's foreign language policy is to guarantee at least an upper-intermediate level (i.e., second semester of intermediate) proficiency in the target language. However, upper-intermediate level proficiency, as operationalized by the two options for satisfying the requirement, seems to fall short of the level of proficiency that would be required either to read about or discuss issues of international affairs. The form-function analysis of a

typical international affairs article revealed that SIPA students need to be familiar with specialized lexis, sophisticated syntax, a wide range of pragmatic functions, and language-specific stylistics in order to read professional texts in this field; the observation of a core economics course showed that the language needed to participate in discussions related to international public affairs requires a high level of topical, linguistic, social, and cognitive competence.

Yet neither a grade of B in the intermediate language class nor passing a proficiency exam seems to indicate that satisfying the requirement is sufficient to function in the target situation. Although both grammatical and pragmatic aspects of communicative language use were covered to some degree in the intermediate language class, the course used only general, real-life language use domains, and not language use domains that pertain to SIPA contexts. In other words, no sophisticated, SIPA-related themes, as found in SIPA content instruction, were included. Due to the artificial nature of the tasks, the proficiency exams generally lacked authenticity and did not appear to be rooted in any recognizable model of communicative language ability.

In terms of the conceptual framework of the present study, the findings of Phase 1 suggest a gap between the present learning situation (as evident from language classes and proficiency exams) and the target language use situation (as suggested, by extension, from core course discourse) that is not bridged by the means (SIPA's foreign language policy).

## **PHASE 2 – INTERVIEW SURVEYS**

The goal of Phase 2 was to survey SIPA stakeholders' opinions regarding SIPA's FL requirement, the FL needs and wants of MIA students, and the match between FL instruction at SIPA and the perceived career needs of MIA students. Data were collected by means of the personal interview. This procedure allowed us both to explore relevant questions and issues with a representative sample of stakeholders from the six constituent groups and to evaluate which questions and issues required follow-up investigation by means of questionnaires. Finally, the personal interviews allowed us to establish a collegial rapport with the stakeholders, one that might inspire cooperation and candid discussion.

Because we were only able to interview a limited number of stakeholders, the generalizability of the findings may be restricted. Additionally, interviews were sometimes led in unintended directions by some interviewees, which may have implications for the validity of inferences drawn from the data. Therefore, the findings from the interview data were regarded as preliminary since the interview data were complemented in Phase 3 of the study (not reported on here) by questionnaire data as a means of compensating for some of these limitations.

### ***Method***

***Participants.*** Out of 134 people contacted, 63 were interviewed from Fall 2000 to Spring 2001. Individuals from all 6 groups of stakeholders participated. This included: 20 MIA students, 10 SIPA alumni, 15 FL faculty, 6 SIPA content faculty, 9 SIPA administrators, and 3 SIPA end-users. For each stakeholder group, interviewees were semi-randomly identified through lists and

contact information (in the form of email addresses and/or phone numbers) provided by SIPA and the University. We did not contact FL faculty who never taught SIPA students.

**Materials.** A structured interview protocol for each constituent group was created to survey opinions in five domains. These included: the context, the learner situation, the target language use situation, the present learning situation, and the means. The interview protocols used a combination of open and closed response questions so that the desired scope of possible answers could be elicited (Brown, 2001). While the interviewers were not expected to follow the protocols verbatim, the protocols served as a general outline for interviewing the constituents to maximize uniformity and comprehensiveness in the data collection process.

A student interview protocol and procedures for carrying out the interviews were developed, piloted, revised, and field-tested (see Appendix A for the student protocol). The student protocol served as a model for constructing protocols for other constituent groups. A background questionnaire for each group was also devised, as was a confidentiality statement.

**Procedure.** Interviews were conducted in person, by phone, and by e-mail (multiple correspondences). Interviewees were asked to sign a confidentiality statement and then asked background questions followed by the survey questions. Interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes. Interviewers took notes, and all but two interviews were audio taped. Interview summary sheets were completed. The audiotapes were reviewed and any supplemental information was added to the summary sheets. Approximately three audiotapes from each stakeholder group, except for the end-users, were transcribed.

**Analysis.** The summaries from members of a given constituent group were combined, and the information for each group was organized on charts according to the interview protocol questions. This information was later coded according to the five domains (i.e., the context, the learner situation, etc.), and reorganized accordingly. Patterns from the needs assessment domains were then identified, summarized, and compared within and across groups; cross-group results are discussed below. It should be noted that in reporting the results, stakeholders occasionally provided multiple responses. As a result, the total number of responses to a given question may, at times, be greater than the total number of respondents.

## **Results**

**Contextual analysis.** The contextual analysis helped us to characterize the stakeholders.

**Students.** Interviewees were enrolled at SIPA during the 2000-2001 academic year. Eight were in their first year, ten in their second, and two were enrolled longer. Students represented five regional and seven functional concentrations. Five students met the FL requirement as non-native speakers of English; seven passed a proficiency exam, and nine took language courses.

**Alumni.** One alumnus/a met the requirement as a native speaker of Chinese, and four passed a proficiency exam. However, three of those who passed a proficiency exam opted to study a foreign language, so that a total of eight alumni took courses. Most had studied traditional beginning, intermediate, and/or advanced level courses; a few had taken specialized language courses (e.g., German for Political and Cultural Purposes).

**Language Faculty.** Of the 15 FL instructors interviewed, 3 taught Spanish, 2 taught French, 2 taught German, 2 taught Hindi/Urdu and 1 each taught Bengali, Finnish, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, and Russian. They discussed over 30 language courses of which two were specialized language courses offered by SIPA. Most of the courses, however, were undergraduate, skill-based courses taught at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels by faculty in the language departments. Of these non-specialized courses, SIPA students comprised a small percentage of the class members (14% at most).

**Content instructors.** The five interviewees specialized in international law, media writing, energy, the environment, and international development, and taught courses at various levels. Some of these interviewees also served as administrators.

**Administrators.** Seven present and one former administrator, representing a variety of regional and functional concentrations, were interviewed. They were familiar with Europe, the Middle East, East-Asia, or Latin America and focused on issues such as conflict resolution, democratization, international trade and economic policy, financial management and public policy, and science and technology policy.

**End-Users.** As only 3 of the 20 end-users contacted were available for interviews, their careers represent only a narrow spectrum of those that might be pursued by SIPA graduates. Two interviewees were based in the U.S.; one was an associate project manager for an international insurance and financial services organization, and the other was a junior associate for an investment management firm. The third was an executive assistant for a South American trading company in Argentina.

**Learner situation analysis.** The learner situation analysis examined the constituents' beliefs regarding the goals, attitudes, expectations, and motivations of the MIA students with respect to FL learning. The discussions revolved around two general topics: the students' choice of language to satisfy the requirement, and their motivations and attitudes toward language study.

With respect to language choice, the students, alumni, and administrators expressed the opinion that previous study, regional concentration, and course offerings all influenced students' choice of language to satisfy the requirement. Students and alumni maintained that, given the heavy course load and the cost of language study, previous study was clearly the primary factor considered, as this option minimized the amount of time needed to meet the requirement. Some students and alumni felt forced to study a particular language because of a lack of course offerings in their language of choice. One alumnus/a noted:

**Excerpt AL1/Int/3**

I originally wanted to study Thai since I knew I was going to be returning to Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, I was unable to study Thai because (a) there was no South East Asian language offering, and (b) SIPA did not encourage alternative language training outside of the University (e.g., funding coursework elsewhere [...]), I opted for Spanish as I had studied it as an undergraduate.

In addition to satisfying the requirement, students, alumni, and administrators cited both instrumental and integrative motivations for pursuing language study. Instrumental reasons

included: to facilitate professional interactions in order to increase credibility and self-confidence on the job, to increase access to information, to provide a competitive edge in the job market, to decrease dependency on translation, and to facilitate survival abroad. FL instructors perceived SIPA students as being motivated primarily by the need to use the language professionally, although their opinions differed from those of the students with respect to the proficiency level at which they believed this goal should be reflected in coursework. Integrative motivations cited by the constituents included: to integrate into the community, to develop cultural sensitivity, and to establish and maintain relationships outside of the workplace.

Interestingly, although some administrators believed that for many students language study was peripheral due to the heavy SIPA course load, three of the five alumni who satisfied the requirement pursued language study nonetheless. Some students expressed a desire to take language courses, but were unable to because of insufficient time, overcrowded classes, placement difficulties, insufficient course offerings, and lack of credit for beginning courses.

Some administrators suggested that language courses could be supplemented with one-on-one tutorials, self-learning opportunities through distance learning and Internet use, intensive programs that would replicate the experience of being in the field, and one-credit courses in specialized areas (e.g., German banking language). They also suggested inter-session FL classes, summer internships in foreign countries, intensive summer immersion courses, crash courses for lower level students, and accelerated courses for false beginners. Some students noted the benefits of an immersion experience.

In addition to formal study, students and administrators expressed the desire for opportunities that would supplement coursework. These included: peer tutoring, conversation practice, language tables at meals, video conferences in a FL, regularly scheduled guest lectures by native speakers from relevant fields followed by question and answer periods, and conversation round tables.

***Target language use situation analysis.*** The target language use situation analysis examined the features that language learners needed to know to function in the target language context. Discussions focused on the importance of FL knowledge and the FL skills needed in professional contexts.

All constituent groups except the FL faculty commented on the importance of FL knowledge. Although some variability was observed, the majority viewed knowing a FL as important for the careers of SIPA students. Estimates of importance ranged from necessary to helpful. Importance was underscored by two end-users, who reported that their organizations offered employees tuition reimbursement for FL study.

Constituent views varied both within and across groups with respect to the importance of specialized language skills in professional contexts. The language faculty saw SIPA students as needing specialized, or context-specific vocabulary (e.g., technical or subtechnical), a view that was echoed at some point throughout all of the interviews. In fact, every group, when talking about language course improvements, suggested the inclusion of content (including technical terms) that pertained to international affairs.

Speaking, listening, and reading were identified as the most crucial skills needed in both domestic and international work contexts according to administrators, students, and alumni. Students placed more importance on speaking, and alumni on reading, although for alumni, the importance of speaking increased when employers were based in non-English-speaking



countries. No groups cited writing as the most important skill. Similarly, no groups cited the need to be able to translate.

In sum, the target language use situation analysis identified specialized language needs, prioritized learning skills needs, and highlighted the importance of FL knowledge for careers in international affairs.

***Present learning situation analysis.*** The present learning situation analysis examined what the learners were currently being offered in terms of language instruction. Discussion in this domain centered on the variety of languages offered and the extent to which courses satisfied learner needs.

While some students and alumni were satisfied with the range of course offerings, others had expressed interest in studying Thai, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Kazak, and Uzbek, which were not offered. Administrators were generally of the opinion that the range of course offerings was lacking with respect to some major languages spoken in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe. One alumnus/a noted that the range of courses was regionally unbalanced.

Language instructors of beginning and intermediate-level courses reported offering little explicit grammar instruction at the beginning level and even less at the intermediate level, taking a conversational approach to language teaching. However, students and alumni felt their courses offered few opportunities for oral practice. Also, constituents in all groups saw the lack of SIPA-related content as problematic. One student remarked:

**Excerpt S10/Int/11**

The requirement does not prepare people for work. Language courses should be more focused on SIPA content.

SIPA-related content served as the basis for a few specialized courses, but was not systematically included in traditional, beginning or intermediate-level courses and only sometimes included in advanced-level courses. This pattern reflected the belief, articulated by some FL faculty and administrators, that SIPA-related content should *not* be introduced until the later stages of language learning, as one administrator noted:

**Excerpt ADM7/Int/7**

I don't think there is any particular value to having a SIPA-content course in the first year. You might in the second semester of the second year move toward a media text reading course...but I don't think prior to that.

Language instructors differed to some degree in their opinions about the proficiency level at which SIPA-related content could be introduced into language learning, but only one thought it should be introduced at the beginning level. In sum, the general consensus among constituents was that the needs of SIPA students were not being addressed by the present learning situation primarily because of the lack of courses offered for some languages, the lack of oral practice in the classroom, and the lack of systematic inclusion of SIPA-related content in language courses other than the few specialized courses offered.

***Means analysis.*** The means analysis examined FL policies, resource issues, organizational structures, and suggestions for program improvement. Since SIPA's FL policy is reflected in the

language requirement, discussions gravitated toward that as well as to the ways in which language instruction at the University could be improved in light of resources and organizational structures.

SIPA's FL requirement is designed to ensure a minimum of upper-intermediate language proficiency, determined by means of a proficiency exam or coursework. At issue is whether passing a proficiency exam or a course is indicative of intermediate-level proficiency, and whether intermediate-level proficiency is sufficient to function in foreign language in a professional capacity.

First of all, comments made by most students and language faculty revealed serious concerns about the reliability, validity, and authenticity of the proficiency tests—concerns that are well founded given the results of our analysis of three such exams—and the use of scores from these exams to make decisions about language study. Also, some students saw standards in the language classes as being too low due to lenient grading policies. They cited other problems with instruction as well. One student noted:

**Excerpt S9/Int/5**

Basically, the course was too easy for me. And there were many other issues—classroom management was a problem and there was not enough conversation among the students. It was supposed to be a SIPA class, but there were only three SIPA students. The undergraduates in the class were very rude.

Regarding SIPA's FL policy, the requirement represents a minimum acceptable level of FL ability needed for a professional in international affairs. In this regard, one content teacher noted that language learning should be a life-long endeavor, not a series of courses. An administrator remarked that being able to be exempted from language study undermines the goal of language maintenance and on-going language development; this policy discourages further language study.

In discussing how the policy could better reflect the FL needs of SIPA students, students, alumni, language and content faculty, and administrators varied with respect to whether or not they thought the requirement should be changed. All recognized the tension between what is necessary and sufficient preparation for the target language use context and what is feasible given the constraints on students' time and material resources as well as the resources of the University. While most constituents found the requirement necessary, but not sufficient preparation, they acknowledged that an increase in the requirement might overburden students. Consequently, few saw it as a viable solution. One administrator remarked:

**Excerpt ADM5/Int/8**

In terms of analyzing the curriculum...with respect to the balance of the investment of time, I am not willing to say at this point that the requirements for language ought to be increased... It's probably something that needs to be considered, and the decision obviously needs to be made in the context of the entire core curriculum.

Suggestions for improving language study at the University were offered by all six constituent groups since no group felt the range of language course offerings or the traditional courses as designed fully met the needs of the SIPA students.

Regarding offerings, SIPA administrators pointed out two obstacles to the university's ability to offer less-commonly-taught languages. For some less-commonly taught languages, no department was available to sponsor the language at the University, while for others that had an administrative affiliation with established language and literature departments, competition for resources was noted.

With respect to the courses themselves, discussion revolved around the disconnection between the curriculum and the practical needs of the students. For example, the need for specialized language courses involving SIPA contexts was identified, and several students mentioned the lack of focus on oral skills. Several SIPA administrators cited the literary orientation of FL departments as problematic, since faculty in those departments often perceived foreign language education to be outside the purview of their scholarly interests.

One FL instructor reported that the course curricula, in many cases, was determined not by language instructors, but by departments, and the departments did not want to create a wide range of intermediate courses.

According to administrators and FL faculty, there existed a severe lack of communication between SIPA and the individual language departments. One administrator stated:

**Excerpt ADM19/Int/7**

There seems to be an unbridgeable gulf between this Institute and the department that teaches the languages... They have in all my experience at [...] University regarded the Institute as making demands that are not compatible with the curriculum that they are responsible for, that is to say, the college curriculum that leads to a major or a graduate curriculum that leads to MA or Ph.D. degrees, and they have a powerful resentment over being asked or expected to teach language courses that are solely in their eyes perceived as service courses for other people.

In sum, the means analysis showed that though the requirement was not viewed as sufficient, increasing it did not seem feasible. There was a need to expand the range of FLs in which courses were offered as well as to tailor FL study to the target language use situations that SIPA students would encounter; however, given that most FL instruction was handled within language and literature departments and designed for their population of students, there were practical and ideological issues that impeded change to these courses. This was exacerbated by an apparent lack of collaboration between SIPA and the various language and literature departments toward addressing these issues.

## **Summary of Phase 2**

This phase of the study surveyed the views of six constituent groups regarding the FL needs of SIPA students as outlined in the four assessment domains. The following findings emerged. First, it was established that knowing a FL was important for MIA students and that they were motivated to learn one or more languages of their regional concentrations. Students generally chose to study languages that were both related to their regional concentrations and with which they were already familiar. Some constituents lamented that important languages from South East Asia were not offered and that logistics made enrollment in some language courses difficult.

Second, it was established that in order to be able to function as needed in a career in international affairs, students required more than an intermediate level of language proficiency, as stipulated by the language requirement. Serious questions regarding the validity of the proficiency exams generated doubts about using the scores from these exams for making decisions about language study. Also, intermediate-level courses were not seen as adequately preparing SIPA students to operate in the foreign language in professional contexts. However, any suggestion to increase the requirement was met with a need for sensitivity to the students' constrained resources and to the intensity of their program.

Third, several suggestions for improving FL instruction were provided. The most salient involved the need to tailor instruction around a dual language-and-content focus, so that instructional topics, tasks, and language would better match the characteristics of foreign language use in international affairs. Some disagreement arose with respect to the implementation of a language for specific purposes curriculum at the beginning levels. Other suggestions included expanding the range of languages available for study and creating extra-curricula opportunities for language learning.

## **TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

SIPA students' motivation to learn foreign languages coupled with the apparent high level of linguistic ability needed to use the foreign language in professional contexts warrants changes, not in SIPA's foreign language policy per se, but in its instantiations. That is, given constraints on students' time and financial resources, it is not advised that the requirement itself be increased without studying the impact of this decision. Instead, we make the following recommendations regarding the two ways for non-international students to satisfy the FL requirement:

### **Language Proficiency Exams**

Current proficiency exams need to be replaced. We suggest the creation of a professionally developed, theme-based language proficiency exam template that could be used as a basis for generating exams for a variety of languages. This exam would be designed to test language knowledge and skills at the upper-intermediate level. These exams should be designed in collaboration with language teaching faculty as from multiple units and validated with empirical evidence, which should be reported in a technical manual for users.

### ***Language Courses***

There appears to be a need for language classes that have some relation to the SIPA-related content. We tentatively suggest the development of a "Foreign Language for Professional Purposes" curriculum that focuses on the language and skills needed to engage communicatively in SIPA-related content and contexts. A range of SIPA topics would be covered based on further research of language needs. In making such a suggestion, however, we recognize two obstacles. The first relates to reluctance on the part of most of the language instructors we interviewed to

include SIPA themes in beginning or even intermediate courses. However, these interviewees seemed unaware of research that demonstrates how several other programs found many benefits of an early introduction to a dual curriculum. For example, Stryker and Leaver (1997) discuss content-based FL programs in several settings including graduate professional schools. In this regard, Vines (1997) describes a language for specific purposes program in French for journalism and telecommunications majors, and Ballman (1997) shows how themes could be used to teach grammar, vocabulary, and content even at the beginning levels. Pawley (1985) lists over 30 research reports in Canada in which the effects and benefits of immersion and language for specific purposes instruction are documented.

The second obstacle to a professional purposes curriculum is the fact that language courses are primarily offered by language and literature departments, which have their own missions. Therefore, implementation of such a program or other improvements to the curriculum would need collaboration and better communication between SIPA and the individual language and literature departments.

Given the abundance of empirical research presented in the last ten years that overwhelmingly supports the interventionist approach to FL teaching and learning (Long & Robinson, 1998), we recommend more focused grammar instruction. It was surprising to see so many teachers treat the explicit teaching of grammar in communicative contexts as if it were an afterthought. In fact, in a recent meta-analysis of over 75 empirical studies investigating instructional effects on the acquisition of a second or foreign language, Norris and Ortega (2000) concluded that “form and meaning focused instructional treatments of whatever sort far surpass non- or minimally focused exposure to the second language” (p. 463), and the effect holds in both the short and the long-term (Doughty & Williams, 1998).

Tied to the need for increased communication and collaboration between SIPA and the University language departments, we also recognize the need for course offerings in less-commonly-taught languages, but again are aware of the practical considerations of doing so. We see the University’s Language Resource Center (LRC) as a viable alternative to traditional courses for languages that are either not affiliated with a language department or are not given priority within those departments. The LRC might also serve to facilitate extra-curricular language activities that would offer students opportunities for additional oral practice. This expanded role of the LRC is, however, dependent upon sufficient resources being made available to it.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current study utilized a multidimensional approach to needs assessment in order to examine the foreign language needs of SIPA students at Columbia University. The conceptual framework allowed us to examine and compare the opinions of multiple stakeholders regarding several dimensions of foreign language study at SIPA. It also allowed us to examine the gaps between what is needed and what is currently available or what could be available.

The contextual analysis provided a wealth of information about the institution and the context of the assessment and helped us identify the stakeholder groups; structured interviews allowed us to explore relevant issues from a number of perspectives. Results from the first two phases of the study provided a tentative case for the need to reform both the language proficiency exams at SIPA and language instruction in the language departments, if SIPA wishes to ensure

that students are prepared to operate in a foreign language in professional contexts. The findings from the first two phases of this study also suggest that SIPA's minimum requirement of an upper-intermediate level of foreign language proficiency may not be enough to equip students with the foreign language skills they will need in their careers. However, strong concerns to increasing the foreign language requirement have been voiced. While the views of these participants provided some insights into the foreign language needs of SIPA students and how these needs could be better addressed, conclusions remain tentative as the labor-intensive nature of conducting interviews limits the number of stakeholders whose views could be surveyed. In the third and final phase of the study, we will again survey the views of the different stakeholders regarding the FL needs of SIPA students, but we will cast a much wider net by administering web-based questionnaires to a greater number of participants from all six constituent groups. In the end, the need to change is an institutional decision based on the collective views of its stakeholders and an analysis of its resources. Without empirical baseline information on how opinions converge and diverge, the seeds of reform are not likely to germinate.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol (Students)

<i>General Questions</i>	<i>Probes</i>
<b>1. Contextual Information:</b> SIPA has a language requirement. How did you go about fulfilling this requirement?	
<b>2. Learner Situation Information:</b> Why did you choose this language? If you could have, would you have chosen a different language?	Which one? Why? (Different requirement; course offerings; future need)
<b>3. Learner Situation Information:</b> How important is the language you are learning for your future career?	At work; after work; at home.
<b>4. Target Language Use Information:</b> Have you ever needed to use this language for work?	If yes: In what contexts? How often? To what extent was English sufficient? (What are some of the things you did in English and some of



	the things you did in the FL?)
<b>5. Means Information:</b> What do you think about the SIPA language requirement?	Does it serve your purposes? Is it enough language study to prepare you for your career goals? Is it too much language study? Should the requirement be changed? How?
<b>6. Present Learning Situation Information:</b> Describe the language course you are taking.	Level? How often does it meet? Is your teacher a native speaker? What are the kinds of things you do? What are the requirements? Is it enough? Too much? Reading, presentations, grammar exercises, conversation, translation? Tests, reports, homework? How much time do you spend a week on the work?
<b>7. Present Learning Situation Information:</b> Is there any SIPA related content in your course? Tell me about it.	Economics, current events, business negotiations?
<b>8. Present Learning Situation Information:</b> How well do you think this language course prepares you to use the language in your career?	
<b>9. Present Learning Situation Information:</b> How can the course be improved to better serve your career needs?	Content? Method? Time commitment/intensity?
<b>10. Learner Situation Information:</b> Generally speaking, how do you best learn a language?	In the classroom or on the street? Conversation or reading? Grammar, exercises, translation? Program/Internet?
<b>11.</b> Is there anything else you would like to add?	