



The State University  
of New York

Alexander N. Cartwright, Ph.D.  
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July 27, 2017

**MEMORANDUM**

**To: SUNY Chief Academic Officers**

**From: Alexander N. Cartwright, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor**

**Subject: Change to SUNY-GER Guidelines Regarding American Sign Language**

I am writing to inform you of a change to the *General Education Requirement (SUNY-GER) Guidelines* for the SUNY Foreign Language category. Beginning with the fall 2017 semester, American Sign Language (ASL) will be treated as a foreign language for SUNY-GER for all students, so long as the ASL courses are approved and meet the learning objectives outlined in the *SUNY-GER Guidelines*.

As you may be aware, under the current *SUNY-GER Guidelines*, ASL courses may only be used to satisfy the foreign language category in the following instances: programs leading to certification in elementary and secondary education; and, in programs leading to careers where there is likely to be significant contact with the d/Deaf and hard of hearing. These conditions were developed during the implementation of SUNY-GER in 1998 and because they were part of the guidance, they may be amended by my office.

Since 1998, consideration of ASL has evolved, such that many states and higher education institutions do accept ASL as meeting foreign language requirements. In light of these developments, last spring, a group of SUNY ASL faculty, along with Presidents and Provosts from six SUNY campuses, wrote a formal request to the Office of the Provost, asking that SUNY-GER be revised such that ASL courses would be accepted for all students. Given the critical importance of this issue for both the general education curriculum as well as SUNY's efforts to promote Inclusive Excellence, I asked the Student Mobility Steering Committee (SMSC) to recommend a shared-governance process to move the discussion forward.

At its November 2016 meeting, the SMSC recommended a process whereby an ad hoc committee would be empanelled to consider the ASL question. Following a period of discussion from March-May 2017, the ad hoc committee submitted a recommendations document to the SMSC, which in turn used this information to develop a final recommendation. The ad hoc committee consisted of four teaching faculty (two ASL faculty and two foreign language faculty), one State-operated campus Chief Academic Officer representative, one community college Chief Academic Officer representative, and one representative from the Student Assembly.

The SMSC carefully reviewed the positions that were presented by the ad hoc committee members, and it recommended that SUNY should: a) remove the restriction on programs for which ASL may be used to satisfy the foreign language GER; b) remove the language

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regarding ASL from the *Guidelines* for SUNY GER courses; and c) treat ASL as a foreign language for SUNY GER as long as the ASL course meets the SUNY GER learning objectives for foreign language from the *Guidelines*. The SMSC was clear that any ASL course that can be used for SUNY-GER *must* include both the communication that is at the core of learning sign language along with learning about the distinctive culture of the d/Deaf and hard of hearing.

After considering the information presented by the ad hoc committee, as well as the recommendation of the SMSC, I have decided that it is in the best interests of SUNY students to accept the recommendations of the SMSC. Therefore, beginning fall 2017, all SUNY campuses are directed to:

- 1) Accept ASL courses that have been approved for SUNY-GER as meeting the SUNY Foreign Language General Education category for all students.
- 2) Update campus websites and other documents, including local posting of SUNY's GER *Guidelines*, to reflect this change. If your campus does post the SUNY-GER *Guidelines* locally, I have attached an updated PDF that can be used as a replacement (see foreign language learning outcome #9 and related footnote).

Finally, I encourage all campuses to submit appropriate ASL courses for approval for SUNY-GER, which you can do using the CourSES web application on the following web page: <http://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/acaproplan/general-education/>

I wish to thank the ad hoc committee members as well as the SMSC committee members for their valuable service regarding this important issue. I appreciate your help in implementing this change to improve both academic and inclusive excellence across the SUNY system.

Sincerely,



Alexander N. Cartwright  
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

Copy: President, University Faculty Senate  
President, Faculty Council of Community Colleges  
President, SUNY Student Assembly  
Dr. Bringsjord  
Dr. Knox  
Dr. Hildebrand  
Dr. Moeckel  
Campus General Education Coordinators  
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