Memo on students admitted deficient in foreign language:

The problem: the budget for the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures falls about $300,000 short of meeting the student demand for classes that the university expects it to offer. This shortfall has resulted from enrollment increases, loss of faculty positions, and most directly the disappearance of “access funds” in recent years. Neither the department nor the College of Liberal Arts can sustain this deficit financing of foreign languages instruction.

Over the coming weeks the faculty in FLL will develop a broad strategy for dealing with the shortfall in their budget, including such issues as minimum class sizes. One element of this strategy will be to no longer allow students who are admitted to the university deficient in foreign language (flagged DFL) to enroll in first-year language classes until they have made up the deficiency. Through the data warehouse we have determined that there are roughly 750 currently-enrolled students who are flagged DFL. This term, there are 72 DFL students (out of a total of 350) enrolled in Spanish 111. We have not identified the number of DFL students in other first-year language courses.

To meet these students’ need for language instruction, the Department of FLL will create Category II proposals for Spanish 95 and Spanish 96—in other words, adopting the Math 95 model, including its funding on the self-supporting Ecampus model. Staffing these courses will entail no financial burden on the department and it will free resources for offering needed sections. Additional revenues may be generated for staffing sections, but that will depend on enrollments in Spanish 95 and 96. These courses will be just one option for students, in addition to community colleges, summer term courses, and possibly online courses. We will make no effort to prevent a student from receiving credits toward graduation for courses taken elsewhere that are transferable to OSU.

This move will have repercussions for students, of course, comparable to those entailed in Math 65 and 95—the additional costs of taking the courses and the lack of college credit toward graduation. As with the math courses, the question is whether the department or the student should have (unfunded) responsibility for remedial or pre-college work. First-year Spanish, of course, is not “remedial” in the same way that Math 65 and Math 95 are remedial. Whether or not students should receive college credit for courses that make up a deficiency in their high school education—and apart from the question of who should pay for these courses—the fact is that students who are admitted to the university without a foreign language successfully complete the first-year language courses. Beginning Spanish is beginning Spanish, whether or not the student has studied another language.

Although our initial motive in making these changes is clearly economic, it is important to recognize the academic benefits that will result. Students in first-year Spanish who studied another language in high school (or who took Spanish in high school but did not test out of Spanish 111—a separate issue) should be capable of moving more quickly than students taking their first-ever foreign language. Students who have fulfilled the
language requirement for admission have learned how languages are structured (most students never hear of a “conjugation” or “declension” until they have studied a foreign language). First-year language courses will become more accelerated without the DFL students. (At the same time, students who are successful in Spanish 95 and 96 could then test into Spanish 113 and complete first-year Spanish in three terms.)

The savings from blocking DFL students from first-year language courses will offset a relatively small portion of the budget shortfall. Revenue from Spanish 95 and 96 could be substantial, but this will depend on whether students choose that option. Whatever pressure on FLL’s budget is achieved will be welcome, but in addition, this action will allow the department to focus its instructional mission more appropriately.

We hope to implement this plan for Fall 2008.