

FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS AN ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS*

R. A. KENT, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Problem:

What is the effect of the present entrance requirement in foreign language in Northwestern University upon

- A. The selection of students, and
- B. Student achievement?

Method:

The method used is descriptive for the most part.

Data:

The data presented are grouped under the following headings:

- I. Applicants Denied Admission.
- II. Persons Admitted on Condition.
- III. Comparative Entrance Requirements of Other Higher Educational Institutions.
- IV. General Scholastic Ability and Foreign Language Study.
- V. Summary.

I—APPLICANTS DENIED ADMISSION.

1. Why 97 applicants were denied admission as Freshmen in the College of Liberal Arts, Northwestern University in Sept., 1924.

TABLE I.

Causes for Refusal.

	Lang.	Math.	Units	Scholarship	Combination	Total
Men	59	5	0	4	3	71
Women	10	6	6	0	4	26
	69	11	6	4	7	97

Of the 69 who were deficient in language, 37 were in the fourth quarter of their high school classes.

*Acknowledgement is here made for assistance given by the following persons in preparing this material: The Personnel Office through E. L. Clark; J. Harold Goldthorpe, Registrar; Herbert F. Sorensen, Statistician to the Studies of the Schools; Frances Doane and Anna Markt, two of my students.

TABLE II.

Placement of the 97 in Quarters of the High School Classes.

	1	2	3	4	Not Known	Total
Men	3	9	6	35	18	71
Women	2	3	3	5	13	26
Total	5	12	9	40	31	97

2. Why 25 applicants for advanced standing were refused admission to the College of Liberal Arts, Northwestern University in September, 1924.

Causes	Men	Women	Total
Low Scholarship.			
a. Dropped from other institutions.....	6	1	7
b. Low grades (excessive no. of D's and F's) 6		4	10
Language Deficiencies	3	1	4
Mathematics Deficiencies	1	0	1
Dishonesty at another institution.....	1	0	1
Combination Causes*	1	1	2
	18	7	25

II—PERSONS ADMITTED ON CONDITION

Note: The data in this section apply to the school year 1923-24.

TABLE IV.

Number of Admissions.

	1st Sem.	2nd Sem.	Total
Number of Students entering.			
Freshmen	601	52	653
Advanced Standing	260	56	316
Total	861	108	969
Number of students conditioned in			
Foreign Languages	177	19	196
Electives	16	0	16
Total	193	19	212
Percent conditioned of total entering	22.4%	17.6%	21.8%
Percent language conditions were of			
the total number of conditions..	91.7%	100 %	92.4%

Out of the total number who were conditioned in language, 169 were Freshmen. This was 23.3% of all the Freshmen.

According to the College Blue Book for 1923-24 (pages 52 and 60) there is no other college or university in Illinois that has as large a percent of its Freshmen condi-

*In these two instances the deficiencies were in both mathematics and foreign languages.

tioned as has Northwestern. The next highest reported is the State University with 15%.

The number of units of language deficiency is shown in the following distribution:

TABLE V.

No. of Units	No. of Persons
$\frac{1}{2}$	10
1	156
2	2
—3	1

The two students who entered with two units of condition each had studied languages not on the list accepted at Northwestern. The one with three units had received his training in a foreign country.

The part of each of the two groups that was placed on probation for poor scholarship during the year was,

126 or 19.7% of all Freshmen.

32 or 18.9% of the conditioned group.

TABLE VI.

Scores in the mental alertness tests.

Measure	Conditioned in Language	All Freshmen
Mean	52.2	52.2
Median	52.2	53.2
S. D.	10.29	10.50
Q. D.	7.31	6.62

The standard of scholarship maintained by each of these two groups:

Point Average— .666 conditioned.

1.066 Freshmen.

The difference is accounted for partly at least by the distribution of these groups in the respective quarters of their high school classes.

TABLE VII.

H. S. Quarter	Conditioned Group	All Freshmen
1 (highest)	17%	28%
2	23%	17%
3	25%	15%
4	4%	6%
Unclassified	31%	34%

The above data would not be so significant except for the noticeable scholastic superiority shown by students

ranking in the first quarter. The relation between quartile grouping of students in high school and scholastic success in college has some light shed on it by the following data:

In the year 1919-20 there were 72 fourth quarter high school students who entered Liberal Arts as Freshmen. According to their scholastic success in college they may be classified in the following manner:

- 4 graduated from Liberal Arts with slightly better than a C average.
- 1 graduated with slightly less than a C average.
- 7 transferred to other N. U. colleges with less than a C average.
- 4 transferred to other institutions with an average of C or above.
- 18 transferred to other institutions with less than a C average.
- 2 dropped college work entirely, with better than a C average.
- 36 dropped college work entirely with less than a C average.

A study of the 4th quarter students of the class of 1925, made after three semesters of work had been completed in college, showed the following distribution:

- 2 were doing work just above a C average.
- 14 were still in Liberal Arts but had less than C average.
- 3 had withdrawn with better than a C average.
- 13 had withdrawn while failing.
- 13 had been excluded.

Careful studies of large groups of Northwestern students through their four years of college work show that relative standing of all quarters remains the same between high school and college.

III—COMPARATIVE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS IN OTHER HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

TABLE VIII.

1. Entrance Requirements in English, Mathematics and Foreign Language in the Conference Institutions.

School	No. of H. S. Units	No. of Units of For. Lang. none (a)	No. of Units of English	No. of Units of Math. none (a)
Chicago University	15	specifically	3	specifically (b)
University of Illinois...	15	2	3	2
Indiana University	16	2	3	3
Iowa University	15	none	3	2
University of Michigan.	15	2	3	2
Minnesota University ..	15	none	3	2
Northwestern University	15	3	3	2
Ohio State University..	15	none	3	0
Purdue University	15	none	3	2½
Wisconsin University ..	15	none	2	2

(a) Three or more units as a principal sequence, and two or more units as a secondary sequence must be selected from separate single groups among the following: (a) Greek, (b) Latin, (c) Modern Language, (d) History, Civics, Economics, Commercial Geography, Commercial Law, (e) Mathematics, and (f) Natural Sciences.

(b) Two and one-half for Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Students.

2. Comparative entrance requirements in English, Mathematics and Foreign Language.

A. Comparative Requirements in the United States. Data for the construction of Figs. 1, 2 and 3 were obtained from the College Blue Book for 1923-24, page 8. In each distribution $\frac{1}{2}$ units were classified with the preceding whole unit, e. g. a school requiring $3\frac{1}{2}$ units is classed with the group requiring 3 units. Averages were computed from the distributions given in the Blue Book.

B. Comparative requirements in the North Central Area.

Data for the construction of Figs. 4 and 5 were obtained from the College Blue Book for 1924, pages 9 and 10.

Forty-eight percent of 544 schools in the United States prescribe the language to be offered at entrance. Data are lacking for the number that make such prescription among members of the North Central Area.

IV—GENERAL SCHOLASTIC ABILITY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

I—FINDINGS IN THE REPORT OF THE CLASSICAL INVESTIGATION

Part One, "The General Report," came from the press in September, 1924. Its findings apply very largely to the teaching of Latin. Most of the findings give no direct evidence of the comparative value of studying Latin for different lengths of time.

1. Of the eight "Instrumental and Application Objectives", evidence is offered in one, "Increased ability to learn the technical and semi-technical terms of Latin employed in other school studies and in professions and

vocations." One study shows that "the student's chances of success in first year French in college are slightly increased in proportion to the number of years he has studied Latin in school" (page 54). Another study draws similar conclusions for both French and Spanish (page 54).

2. Of the four "Disciplinary Objectives" evidence is offered in one, "The development of certain desirable habits and ideals which are subject to spread, such as habits of sustained attention, orderly procedure, overcoming obstacles, perseverance; ideals of achievement, accuracy and thoroughness; and the cultivation of certain general attitudes such as dissatisfaction with failure or with partial success." One study shows "that successive courses in Latin exhibit a very close inner relationship and therefore are more effective for the cumulative development of habits essential to the study of Latin" (page 58). A supplementary study shows "that there is a higher correlation between marks in first-year Latin and marks in other subjects in the three years following than is true of any other first year subject" (page 58).

3. Of the eight "Cultural Objectives" evidence is offered on two.

A. There is "a marked superiority of three year Latin pupils over non-Latin pupils of the same general scholastic ability in their knowledge of outstanding historical facts connected with the content and background of Caesar's Gallic War and of the orations of Cicero commonly read. The superiority of two-year Latin pupils over non-Latin pupils in the section of the text covered with the content and background of Caesar's Gallic War was somewhat less marked. The degree of attainment of the three-year and two-year Latin pupils as compared with the non-Latin pupils of the same general scholastic ability was found to be nearly the same in the case of those high school pupils who had studied history" (pages 64, 65). The results of one test "on the content and background of Caesar's Gallic War, with Latin and non-Latin pupils who were completing their second year of high school, show an average superiority on the part of two-year Latin pupils over

non-Latin pupils although this superiority is very slight in those portions of the test concerned with the longer historical implications of the text" (page 65).

B. The second cultural objective concerned was, "Increased ability to understand and appreciate references and allusions to the mythology, traditions, and history of the Greeks and Romans. Data show that Latin pupils make little growth in this ability in the first two years, although they make a large gain in the last two years" (page 67).

II—A STUDY OF NORTHWESTERN STUDENTS

A. The following table shows the mean of point average of groups of students taking certain foreign languages:

TABLE IX.

No. of Students	Language	Mean Point average in other subjects.
269	Latin	1.4600
266	Spanish	1.0125
75	German	1.0450
656	French	1.0725*

B. The following table shows the coefficient of correlation between marks in each of the foreign languages pursued in Northwestern, and certain other subjects:

TABLE X.

No. of Students	Subjects considered	Correlation figure.
260	Spanish and English.....	.22
26	Spanish and French.....	.59
266	Spanish and all other subjects.....	.41
656	French and other subjects.....	.40
	(not including mathematics)	
164	French and Latin.....	.44
667	French and English.....	.41
75	German and other subjects.....	.46
269	Latin and other subjects.....	.48
656	Mathematics and other subjects.....	.41
	(not including French)	
169 Freshmen	Language and all other Freshman subjects	.44

C. The following table gives a display of information similar to the above, but for subjects other than foreign language. It is given in order to determine whether such comparisons show peculiar similarity between scholastic ability and language ability only, or whether similar correlation exists between other subjects.

*Mathematics is not included in the other subjects in this figure.

TABLE XI.

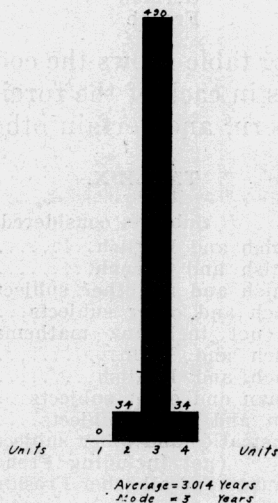
No. of Students	Subjects Correlated	Correlation figure
858	English and Mathematics.....	.31
858	English and other subjects (not including mathematics)41
858	Mathematics and other subjects (not including English)43

V—SUMMARY

1. The present foreign language requirement is one of the two highest ranking causes for rejection of those who apply for admission as Freshmen. It is outranked only by poor scholarship. It is also second in rank as a cause for rejection of applicants for advanced standing. (Table I.)

2. The foreign language requirement is the cause of the conditioning of new students in more than 90% of those who are conditioned. (Table II.)

FIG. I
ENGLISH ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS OF 558
INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.



3. Northwestern has the same English entrance requirements as that of the large majority of schools for the entire country (Fig. I), and it is believed for the North Central Area also, although at the time of writing this report data for the last group were not available.

FIG. II
MATHEMATICS ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS OF 361
INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.

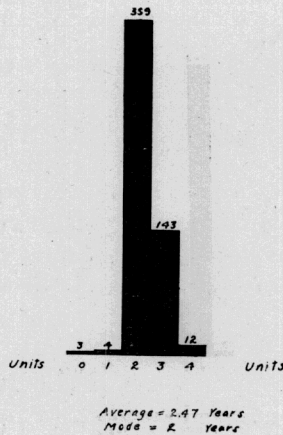
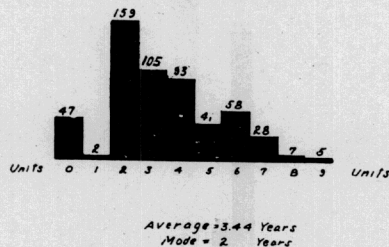


FIG. III
FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS OF 348
INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.



In mathematics entrance requirements Northwestern is below the average for the entire country (Fig. II) and with the marked majority in the North Central Area. (Fig. IV.)

The three year foreign language requirement places Northwestern below the average, but about the modal group in the entire country (Fig. III), and above both the average and the mode in the North Central Area. (Fig. V)

Among the conference schools Northwestern stands by itself in language requirements, and in language alone. (Table VIII.)

FIG. IV
COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS IN MATHEMATICS
OF 201 INSTITUTIONS IN NORTH CENTRAL STATES.

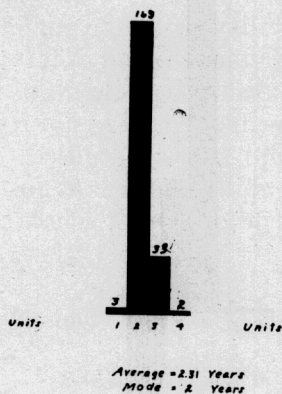
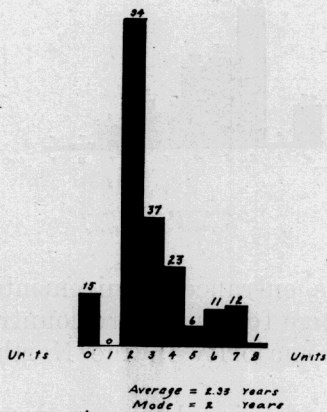


FIG. V
COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGE OF 133 INSTITUTIONS IN
NORTH CENTRAL STATES



4. The report on the Classical Investigation gives information so meager as to be unconvincing, if not negligible, in any attempt to answer the question whether our present language requirement is educationally sound.

5. The study of correlations among Northwestern students, in so far as it is conclusive, reveals no superiority of any particular subject as the measure of

scholastic ability or achievement. The fact of a nearly uniform level of correlations, no matter how the subjects are paired, only suggests that ability or achievement (or lack of it) in one subject is more likely than not to be accompanied by ability or achievement (or lack of it) in other subjects. (Tables X and XI.)

6. Superior Scholarship in College in any group is to be accounted for in terms of native ability far more than in terms of any special subject studied. The most reliable measures of the ability known at present seem to be intelligence tests and high school scholarship.