

SIUE now offering Critical Languages

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The 2012 fall semester marks the first time SIUE has offered critical language classes. These self-instructed programs are designed to be fast paced ways to become proficient at high demand languages.

The history of critical language programs dates back to the end of World War Two when the Foreign Service Institute noted that certain languages vital to national security, diplomacy, and business relations were underrepresented in terms of how many citizens could speak and comprehend them. Now the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASILP) offers courses and materials for the rapid teaching of critical languages.

Demand for critical language instruction is currently very high among military personnel who need to know the language of the area they will be deployed in. The programs are also in demand for international business professionals who need to be able to communicate in a global market.

These self-managed courses offered by SIUE take place outside of a traditional classroom setting with students being given the NASILP course materials. Instead of normal classroom hours, each student will be expected to spend three hours a week in one-on-one sessions with native-speaking tutors.

“You attract a different type of student,” Joao Sedycias, chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, explained. “Students are highly motivated and involved, and they really want to be there,” Sedycias added.

One major advantage of courses like these is that they can be offered very inexpensively by the university and drastically increase the total number of languages a student can learn at SIUE.

“In a critical language course, if you have one student, you can run it,” Sedycias shared.

Critical language courses will not be replacing those languages currently offered on a broader scale at SIUE due to the fact that they are so centrally focused. The courses are designed to improve speaking and comprehension but do not include the broader cultural background present in more established language programs. They are however, very useful tools for individuals who

will be visiting the country in question and should meet the expectations of two-year language programs.

Currently SIUE is offering critical language programs in Russian, Turkish, and Brazilian Portuguese, with more languages to be added as interested students and tutors become available. From an enrollment standpoint, the programs are already a great success, as they have received thirty students when initial expectations were for three or four.