



**Information Paper:
Impact of Increased Contact Hours in Standard Language Courses (LX203-204)**

Purpose: In AY 07-08, the Academy increased the number of contact hours for the Standard LX203-204 course from 40 to 80 hours per semester (from 2.5 days to 5 days a week). This paper will investigate how this change has impacted cadet language learning in DFL's LX203-204 course sequence.

Background: In response to funding received from the Language Transformation Initiative, West Point took several steps toward improving its language and cultural instruction. One of those steps was to increase the amount of contact hours for LX203-204 from 40 to 80 hours per semester. As a result, the Standard Language courses started meeting 55 minutes 5 days a week rather than 2.5 days a week.

Data Analysis: To illustrate how this change has affected the cadet language learning experience, several sets of data were gathered and analyzed. These data included:

- a) the types of revisions made to learning items in LX203-204, e.g., amount of material covered, amount of cultural instruction, Term-end Exams (TEEs), Written and Oral Partial Reviews (WOPRs), Oral Partial Reviews (OPRs)
- b) course and TEE grades before and after the change,
- c) course director interviews, and
- d) random Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) testing.

Results: As a starting point, increasing the number of attendances per semester from 40 to 80 allowed the Academy to revise the Standard LX203-204 course content. In essence, the Department of Foreign Languages responded by making two significant changes to the LX203-204 curriculum: 1) teaching more material and/or 2) teaching the same material but in greater depth. Typical examples of these revisions can be seen in Arabic, Russian, German, and Portuguese.

ARABIC (Category IV language)

In Arabic, both of the above approaches were used. In Standard Arabic, each chapter in the textbook is now allocated 40% more class time. Instead of covering one chapter in 3 attendances, coverage of one chapter has been extended to 5 attendances (Less is expected to be covered as homework



and more is reviewed in class). In addition to this change, Arabic now covers 22 chapters from the textbook instead of 19 previously – a 15% increase. Course directors also report an overall increase of cultural content in their classes with 18 attendances now dedicated to cultural instruction. Analysis of TEEs in Standard Arabic shows more cultural items as well as more items dedicated to grammar. WOPR items dedicated to listening and reading are also more numerous and more demanding.

The increase in contact hours in Standard Arabic also allows a more in-depth focus on oral skills. Consequently, assessment of oral performance in Arabic was modified to account for this change with the most notable difference being the amount of emphasis given to spoken Arabic during WOPRs. Previously, the oral portion of WOPRs was conducted at the same time as the written portion and was typically allocated only 3-5 minutes per cadet. Now, however, two full attendances can be allocated to oral exams resulting in an increase in time dedicated to one-on-one assessment of oral skills. While no significant difference in overall course grades has been noticed, course directors do report an improvement in oral performance – both on the WOPRs and in oral presentations (four are now required instead of two previously) in which the grammar and vocabulary are more sophisticated and the pronunciation more accurate.

Additionally, cadets and instructors alike report an enhanced learning/teaching experience in the new 5-day-a-week course. Course directors report a qualitative increase in motivation seemingly due to the fact that the amount of assigned homework has been significantly reduced in response to having more time in the classroom with the instructor. Moreover, course directors report better section cohesiveness and better retention of material between semesters.



Figure 1. Arabic

Summary of 5-day-a-week Language Instruction from Arabic	
COURSE REVISIONS	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage of each chapter in primary textbook given 40% more class time. • 15% more material covered from primary text. • 18 attendances dedicated to cultural instruction. • TEEs cover more material – more items on culture, grammar, listening and reading. • 2 full attendances are allocated for assessment of oral skills during the WOPRs. • 4 oral presentations required – a 100% increase (2 previously). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral portion of WOPR and oral presentations are significantly improved with more sophisticated grammar/vocabulary and improved pronunciation. • Cadet/instructor motivation is improved. • Better section cohesiveness has been observed. • Better retention of material between semesters has been observed.

RUSSIAN (Category III language)

Similar to Arabic, the Russian section was able to adopt both approaches. In addition to increasing the amount of time spent on each chapter of the textbook, more chapters were able to be covered in both the primary textbook (two additional units – a 20% increase) and in the cultural text (six additional chapters – a 63% increase). Analysis of TEEs in the 5-day-a-week course shows a 25% increase in the length of the exams with more grammar, vocabulary, listening, and cultural items. The oral portion of WOPRs and TEEs has also been improved. In addition to being able to spend more time on these assessments, they have been qualitatively changed. Because of the additional time allocated to oral exams, new more effective assessment activities were introduced such as more sophisticated role-play exercises and more in-depth probing items from the instructors.

As with Arabic, course directors reported improved oral performance from cadets in the 5-day-a-week course. During oral exams, cadets not only spoke with better pronunciation but also comprehended spoken speech from instructors more easily. The use of automated expressions (memorized “chunks” of language) was also reduced and replaced by more creative language use. Course directors further report



that cadets displayed more mastery of advanced language features (e.g., dative case and time expressions) in their oral production than in previous semesters.

Figure 2. Russian

Summary of 5-day-a-week Language Instruction from Russian	
COURSE REVISIONS	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coverage of each chapter in primary textbook given more class time.• 20% more material covered from primary text (2 additional units).• 63% more material covered from cultural text (22 chapters up from 14).• TEEs cover more material – 25% more items on culture, grammar, listening and reading.• 2 full attendances allocated for assessment of oral skills during WOPRs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cadet oral performance significantly improved with more sophisticated grammar/vocabulary, listening comprehension, and improved pronunciation.• Cadets using more creative language instead of relying on memorized “chunks.”• Improved use of advanced language features such as dative case forms and time expressions.

GERMAN (Category II language)

The German section also chose the path of covering both more material and covering it more in-depth. LG203/4 now allocates more attendances to each chapter from the text and allows for a more thorough coverage of exercises from the workbook. Additionally, German has implemented a much more robust approach to cultural instruction. In addition to dedicating one attendance per week to discussion of cultural topics, one full week is now spent covering German history. German has also incorporated more “Movie Days” into the lesson list as well as new cultural activities using authentic online newspapers.

Analysis of WOPRs and TEEs shows a significant increase in the amount of material covered on WOPRs but no significant change on the TEE. WOPRs now include a completely new section dedicated to listening comprehension not previously used due to time constraints. Additionally, the oral portion on WOPRs (and TEEs) is given more time and attention with an extra attendance allocated for assessing oral performance. Moreover, all oral portions on WOPRs and TEEs now involve newly developed role-



playing assessments that integrate cultural and language features – an activity previously untenable due to time constraints. To acknowledge these revisions, the WOPRs have been allocated more points than in previous semesters.

As previously observed in Arabic and Russian, LG203-204 course directors report a significant improvement in oral performance on WOPRs and TEEs. Furthermore, LG361-362 course directors report that cadets coming from the 5-day-a-week classes outperform other students in the areas of culture, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. In contrast to other languages, German has more cadets starting their language instruction at USMA in the Intermediate course. Up to 50% in LG361 are students who have prior experience with German (matriculating from high school, etc.).

Figure 3. German

Summary of 5-day-a-week Language Instruction from German	
COURSE REVISIONS	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage of each chapter in primary textbook as well as workbook exercises given more class time. • New cultural instruction implemented including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ one attendance dedicated to culture each week ○ one full week of history ○ new cultural activities using online newspapers ○ more “movie days” • WOPRs cover more material (including more sophisticated listening comprehension exercises) and are allocated more assessment points. • 1 extra attendance allocated for assessment of oral skills during WOPRs. • New role-play exercises developed for oral Partial reviews that integrate culture and language features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cadet oral performance significantly improved in the areas of grammar/vocabulary and pronunciation. • Cultural knowledge improved and demonstrated in Intermediate German. • 5-day-a-week cadets outperform other students (coming from high school, etc.) in Intermediate German in the areas of reading/listening comprehension, vocabulary, culture, and fluency.

**PORTUGUESE (Category I language)**

The Portuguese section took the opportunity of the change to 5-day-a-week instruction to update their textbook to a more modern text that would better apply to more in-depth language instruction. While focusing on more in-depth coverage of content, cadets are also introduced to some new material including one major verb tense (present subjunctive) that has previously been introduced only in Intermediate Portuguese. Additionally, Portuguese has increased cultural instruction to 12 dedicated attendances per semester.

Analysis of TEEs shows a 50% increase in covered material with new items in grammar, vocabulary, culture, and history. Specifically, new in-depth reading comprehension items have been added where few existed previously. The oral portion of the TEE has also been expanded. Similar to Arabic and Russian, 2 days have now been allocated to assessment of oral skills (also on the WOPRs).

Course directors in Portuguese, as in Arabic and Russian, report improved oral performance from cadets in 5-day-a-week language classes. While no significant difference in test or course grades has been observed, cadet performance on oral exams is improved with cadets exhibiting more flexibility in speech and improved pronunciation and grammar. Additionally, in Summer 2008, several LP203/4 cadets who received 5-day-a-week instruction had the opportunity to travel on an academic IAD trip to Brazil with LP362 cadets who had completed both Standard and Intermediate Portuguese during the 3-day-a-week program. Trip OICs report that cadets who completed Standard Portuguese in the 5-day-a-week program were able to communicate much more readily and with less hesitation than those who had completed Beginning and Intermediate Portuguese in the 2.5 days-a-week program.

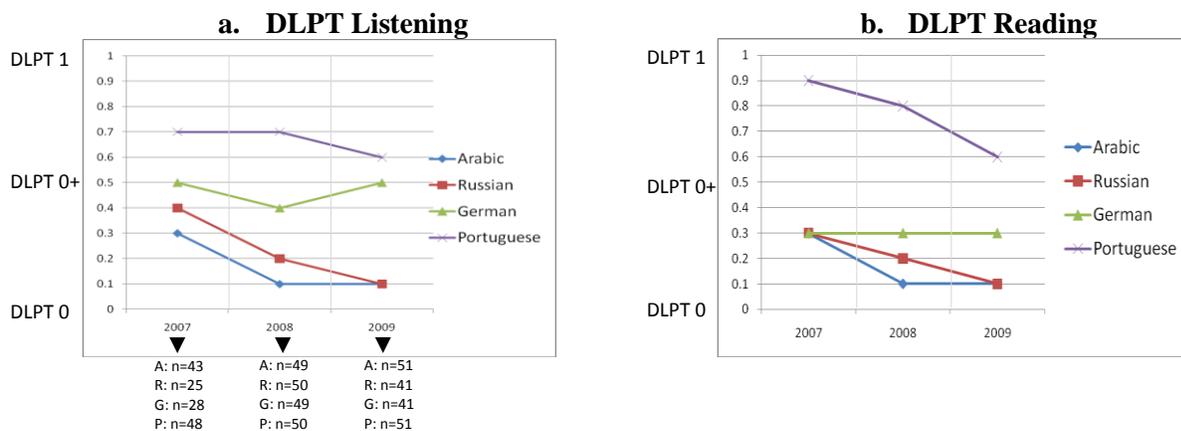
Similarly, course directors from Intermediate Portuguese (LP361/2) have begun to see a difference in the preparedness of cadets coming out of the 5-day-a-week LP203/4 classes. Cadets from 5-day-a-week classes exhibit more confidence in their skills during LP361/2 as well as improved retention of material from LP203/4. Additionally, both fluency and accuracy are much improved.

Figure 4. Portuguese

Summary of 5-day-a-week Language Instruction from Portuguese	
COURSE REVISIONS	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted new textbook better suited to 5-day-a-week language instruction. One additional verb tense (present subjunctive) covered. Twelve attendances now dedicated to cultural instruction. TEEs increased in size 50% with more grammar, vocabulary, culture, and history items. More in-depth reading comprehension items now included as well. Two attendances now allocated to oral assessment on WOPRs and TEEs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexibility in vocabulary and more accuracy in grammar and pronunciation observed in cadet oral performance. Cadets more prepared for Intermediate Portuguese (LP361/2) with better vocabulary retention, more confidence, and improved willingness to communicate than in previous semesters.

DLPT Scores: To further investigate the outcomes of the increase in contact hours, DFL randomly tested cadets’ listening and reading proficiency in Spring-semester Standard Language courses (LX204) using the Defense Language Proficiency Test in AYs 2007, 2008, and 2009. Figures 5a & b below show these data for the four languages discussed above. Note: Academic Year 2007 is used as a baseline as it occurred PRIOR to the implementation of 5-day-a-week instruction.

Figure 5a & b. Listening & Reading Proficiency on the DLPT





Unfortunately, these data have been deemed essentially unusable due to the change from DLPT version IV to version V for some Arabic and Russian testers in 2008. So, while in some cases these data show a downward trend primarily from 2007 to 2008, this can, in part, be explained by the change to the significantly more difficult DLPT version V, which has caused lower DLPT scores throughout the Army. Additionally, it is important to note that the DLPT is not designed to assess low-level language proficiency (DLPT Scores 0 – 1+). In light of this fact, the Dean’s International Intellectual Development Division in coordination with DFL has contracted with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to develop a “prochievement” test that better mirrors the specific language curriculum at USMA and is geared towards assessing low-level proficiency.

It is also important to note that the DLPT does not test oral proficiency. While reading and listening are crucial skills, anecdotal evidence in this study suggests cadets in 5-day-a-week language classes have shown most improvement in the area of oral performance.

Discussion: While course grades have remained relatively unchanged, analysis of course revisions as well as gathered anecdotal evidence clearly show that the learning process in LX203-204 has been enhanced significantly by the increase in contact hours. Cadets coming out of 5-day-a-week Standard Language courses tend to speak with more accuracy, fluency, creativity, and better pronunciation. They also demonstrate better retention of material between semesters and during the transition to Intermediate language courses.

The increase in contact hours has also affected instruction of cultural topics throughout DFL. All Standard Language courses are now able to spend more time on culture. While the cultural context in which the language is used has always been taught by DFL instructors as an integrated part of Standard Language courses, the increase in contact hours now allows the Department to dedicate entire attendances to the discussion of culture, history, geography, music, cinema, literature, etc.

Analysis of assessment devices (WOPRs, OPRs, TEEs) shows an increase in emphasis on all four modalities of learning (reading, writing, listening, speaking) but especially in the area of speaking. Oral



assessments in all languages have become more sophisticated and more numerous. Greater emphasis is given to creative speech that is more accurate, fluent, and flexible. This can further be seen in the increased amount of time spent on such assessments across all languages.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests better morale and motivation both on the part of both cadets and instructors. Cadets' daily homework is limited to forty-five minutes per attendance and more student learning takes place in the classroom. Instructors now have additional opportunities in class for proper modeling, error detection and remediation, and cultural instruction. More time in class has also led to better section cohesiveness.

In conclusion, the evidence in this study strongly suggests that the increase in contact hours in Standard Language courses from 40 to 80 per semester has enhanced the learning process and outcomes in several ways. Standard Language courses now teach language and culture in greater depth with more emphasis on all four language skills. Such emphasis has also led to the use of better textbooks, cultural texts, and improved assessment instruments. As a result, cadets now demonstrate better cultural awareness, retain more of what they learn, and are more motivated to study their language. Overall, and most importantly, the cadets are speaking more fluently, with increased accuracy, flexibility and creativity, and with much improved pronunciation.