

Language policy at the University of Geneva: 18 measures

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The University of Geneva is a French-language university regularly ranked among the world's top 100. It takes the position that students need to master French in order to take the courses offered at the university. This mastery of French is also required for instructors hired by the university. Open to the world and conscious of the benefits of multilingualism for enhancing its excellence, the University also encourages the learning and use of other languages employed in the academic and scientific community. Therefore, the University has elaborated a language policy in which it sets down its intentions regarding:

- **Encouraging**, long-term, among the student body, mastery of the languages used in their respective fields. Multilingualism is more and more required for access to employment in a society of globalized knowledge where information management plays an increasingly important role.
- **Encouraging excellent research**, promoting the confrontation of ideas in multiple languages, depending on the fields concerned, and avoiding the concentration of scientific expertise in countries with dominant languages.
- **Taking into account linguistic factors for the strategic positioning of the university**, specifically in the development of a profile that makes it stand out from other institutions.
- **Supporting the development of Master's degree programs in languages other than French, and ensuring sufficient guidelines are in place.**

To achieve these objectives, an action plan has been put in place, with elements to be implemented over time given the ambition and costs associated with such a policy.

This plan proposes 18 specific measures, organized into the following 6 themes:

1. **Language-related admission requirements for programs;**
2. **Language instruction;**
3. **Languages of instruction;**
4. **Languages for research activities;**
5. **Languages for administrative functions;**
6. **Languages for external communication.**



1. LANGUAGE-RELATED ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS FOR PROGRAMS

Currently, non-Francophone students who wish to study at the Bachelor's level at the University of Geneva (UNIGE) are required to take a French exam. Successfully passing this exam is a prerequisite for admission to UNIGE. Since 2010, this exam has been made optional at the Master's level.

Measures

1. **In principle, at the Bachelor's level, the language exam is required** for non-Francophone students. At the Master's level, the faculties are free to make it mandatory.
2. **Upon request from faculties, the University organizes a mandatory French exam for non-Francophones, at the Bachelor's and/or Master's level. These exams are organized with the support of the competent body, which is currently the *Ecole de langue et civilisation françaises (ELCF)*, and will be the *Maison des langues*, upon its creation, hereinafter referred to as "the competent body".**

2. LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The ELCF, with its privileged position, offers instruction targeting the entire university community (students, and on a case-by-case basis, employees), with priority given to non-French-speakers. These cover a broad array of competencies (written, oral, specialized language, etc.). This is in line with objective 2.2 of the 2008-2011 Agreement on Objectives signed with the Council of State, which stipulates that the University of Geneva must "...offer instruction in French language and culture to non-Francophone students".

Long term, UNIGE plans to offer to all students and employees, independent of courses offered in the framework of programs of study, a coordinated ensemble of specialized language courses. These will cover topics such as scientific writing and reading in English and/or scientific writing and reading in German. Additionally, each Faculty is free to offer additional language courses and/or a specific language assistance program for non-Francophone instructors, with costs in principle borne by the Faculties.

Measures

3. **Non-Francophone students enrolled at the University of Geneva have access to French courses organized by the competent body as defined in the second measure.** These courses, as a function of available spots and according to procedures to be defined, target ordinary students and exchange students.



4. **Sources of external funding are actively sought out to continue offering French courses to non-Francophone students** studying at UNIGE, for example in the framework of international agreements.
5. **Each Faculty can implement, within the modules or electives in its programs of study, at the Bachelor's and/or Master's level, the possibility, or even the requirement, for students to earn credits in language courses.**
6. In all cases, **the language-related efforts requested of or offered to students should result in the attribution of ECTS credits**, in line with three possible formulas and in addition to the preceding measure:
 - **earning of a language attestation,**
 - **earning of a language certification in addition to the degree studied for,**
 - **credits awarded to students having completed an exchange at a university whose language of instruction is not French.**
7. Regarding language offerings, **the University actively supports the development of alternative models such as language 'tandems'** (a regular program of bilingual conversation between two students who want to learn each other's language).
8. When courses at the Master's or doctoral level are taught in English (or in German), **the students have the possibility of taking advantage, beforehand, of relevant language support that meets their specific needs.**
9. **Students registered for a doctoral program at UNIGE can, according to procedures to be defined, take advantage of courses on writing and oral presenting in English or in German.** These courses are offered in the framework of CUSO doctoral programs, or by the University of Geneva.
10. The University of Geneva can, **on request and upon payment, offer a language assistance service for instructors** that is designed to provide punctual support for non-Francophone instructors in the preparation of their courses in French. On request by the instructor or the Faculty, this service can also be provided if **teaching evaluations** reveal poor performance due to insufficient mastery of the language of instruction (cf. directives on teaching evaluations).

3. LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION

In accordance with objective 2.2 of the 2009-2011 Agreement on Objectives, the University of Geneva must affirm *"...with the exception of language study programs, French as the language of instruction for Bachelor's students, and ensure the possibility of studies in French for at least one Master's program consecutive to each Bachelor's program"*.



In general, French remains the language of instruction, even if some courses can be taught in English. It is also possible for Master's programs to be offered completely in English, as long as language support is organized.

In cases where courses in English are required and no replacement option is offered in French, students must have the possibility to take advantage, either before or during their studies, of relevant language training that meets their specific needs.

When courses are taught in languages other than French, the descriptions of the programs and modules shall include precise details on the languages used and the minimum language levels required, as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Measures

11. **Bilingual programs** (offering different languages of instruction within a plan of study) **are encouraged**. A program is considered "bilingual" if at least a third of its courses are taught in a language other than the one used for the other courses. As an exception, and when justified, elective and even required courses at the Bachelor's level (e.g., BARI), may be taught in a language other than French, or even doubled, to offer students who so desire to take a course in a language other than French.
12. **A successfully completed bilingual program shall award, in addition to the diploma, a specific mention** in the form of a language attestation or a certification.

4. LANGUAGES FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

UNIGE supports the efforts of researchers who wish to develop their competencies in different languages in order to take a more active role in international research networks.

Measure

13. The University of Geneva can, on request and upon payment, offer a **language assistance service for researchers that is designed to provide punctual support for writing or reading scientific works in French, English, or German**.



5. LANGUAGES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

The University's language for administrative functions is French. All communications to students and to employees are furnished at least in that language. Services frequently in contact with a non-Francophone public can develop internal competencies in English.

Measures

14. Important communications principally related to ethics or health are, in principle, translated at least into English in order to ensure the broadest possible dissemination.
15. Administrative procedures for non-Francophone students are facilitated.
16. Administrative and technical personnel can take advantage of a language assistance service when the needs of their duties justify it.

6. LANGUAGES FOR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Official relations with universities and other institutions in the Swiss academic milieu are carried out in the national languages.

The language(s) used in the framework of official relations with foreign universities and international academic institutions is/are chosen on a case-by-case basis.

By default, the language for promoting the institution and recruiting students is French. International promotion of training programs and student recruitment make as much use as possible of local languages, and in other cases of English or any other language facilitating wide-ranging communication. Bilingual programs and those principally taught in a language other than French primarily recruit in the languages in question.

Promotional materials, especially campaigns through which UNIGE aims at increasing awareness of its program offerings, shall be exclusively produced in French when they are disseminated in Francophone Switzerland or in other Francophone countries or regions. When they are disseminated in other countries or regions, they shall strive to make use of the local language(s).

Measures

17. The primary paper and electronic documents for promotion and presentation of UNIGE shall be translated into other languages as a function of needs and the public in question.
18. Certain documents useful for mobility and employability can be translated into English by competent internal persons or services.

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