



Five College Center for World Languages

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Format

What is the format of Spoken Arabic courses? How are these courses different from regular classroom language courses?

What is the course format?

Spoken Arabic courses are currently offered as Supervised Independent language courses. Students in a Supervised Independent Spoken Arabic course work independently during the week and then have a weekly 60-minute conversation session to practice using the material studied independently. The conversation session is led by a native speaker trained to be a conversation partner with the program. Conversation sessions typically have only 1-3 students. The final grade for a Supervised Independent Spoken Arabic course will be based 80% on a final oral evaluation conducted by a member of the Five College Arabic faculty or an external evaluator, 10% on attendance, and 10% on on-time submission of weekly self-assessment reports.

At the lower levels (generally levels I through III), a detailed syllabus guides preparation for each week's session. Upper-level students participate in choosing topics for weekly discussion. Students should expect to spend about 4 hours per week working independently to prepare for the 60-minute conversation practice session each week. The final oral evaluation at the end of the course is based on the content of the syllabus for the semester.

How is a conversation session different from a regular classroom session?

Teachers in a classroom course often introduce new material to students and then have students practice using the material in the classroom and at home. For a conversation session, a student prepares the material ahead of time, practicing extensively on his/her own. The student then attends the conversation session and participates in the activities based on prior preparation. The activities in a conversation session emphasize active use of the language to communicate with other students and the conversation partner.

Why is the person who leads my section referred to as a "conversation partner" rather than a "teacher"?

The term "conversation partner" is used to stress the nature of the session. A regular classroom teacher presents information to a larger body of students and then leads the class through a set of activities designed to address the common needs of the entire group. A conversation partner works with a small group of students to practice, refine, and elaborate upon knowledge and skills students have developed through independent study.

Who can be a conversation partner?

A variety of individuals work as conversation partners for the program. Most conversation partners are undergraduates; some graduate students or community members may also be conversation partners. Conversation partners must be native speakers or have near-native proficiency in the language. Conversation partners are trained and supervised by the Center.

What is a course organizer?

Each course offered by the Five College Center for World Languages has a staff member assigned as the course organizer for the course. The staff member handles logistics for the course for both students and the conversation partner, reads weekly self-assessment reports, schedules final oral evaluations, and works with the program director to address student concerns. The course organizer is the person to contact about difficulties ordering the textbook or accessing multimedia materials, questions about the syllabus or assignment due dates, and questions about any other logistical aspects of the course. The current course organizer for Spoken Arabic courses is Theo Hull, Program Assistant with the Center. They may be reached at fcmlp2@umass.edu or by phone at 413-542-5264.

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