This past week, faculty members voted in favor of lessening the foreign language requirement for a Bachelor of Arts degree from two years to one. Plenty of people are relieved. I am not one of them. In fact, this seems like a sizeable step backward on part of the university.

Of course, I can understand why two semesters less of required language classes could be appealing. Learning a different language is certainly challenging and time-consuming—two qualities that aren’t exactly enticing to students who just want to get the degree they came here for. We all have goals, and certainly not all of them involve leaving our English-speaking country for longer than a nice vacation. I promise, I get it.

But as I’m finishing up my second year of a foreign language, I’m nothing less than appalled by this change. Like everyone else, I have my life goals that don’t necessarily include fluency in German or French. However, the cliché that the journey is worth more than the destination has never been truer to me than in my college experience. Getting the degree and getting out of here is practical, but it also misses the point of what college is meant to do: broaden your horizons. Expand your understanding.

Learning a new language is just one way this happens. I have learned more about different cultures, and my own English language, in my four semesters of Lakota than I have in any other class I’ve taken at USD in three years.

In fact, I’m curious as to why students weren’t able to play a more active role in this decision making process. Granted, a large majority would likely be in favor of lessening the requirement, but the fact stands that those paying tuition and taking the classes ought to get a word in when it comes to curriculum changes. Or at least a ringside seat.

If this had been the case, perhaps the contradiction of halving the language requirement would have been addressed. On USD’s website, there is a link to the explanation of our commitment to inclusive excellence which is dated March 14th—barely two weeks ago.

Within this statement is a dedication to “graduating globally-aware students who are leaders in working with people from diverse backgrounds.”

“Furthermore,” it states, “diversity and inclusiveness are assets that can be utilized to help prepare all students for living and working in an increasingly complex and global society.”

Nowhere within this statement do I see anything that would inspire a vote less than a week after its publication to cut foreign language requirements. Rather, I would expect the range of languages to increase! Imagine the opportunities for a business major learning Chinese. The Department of Defense has positions which offer six-figure incomes for Arabic speakers.

Maybe it’s just me, but I’m not seeing a downside.

However, with all this said, I could easily be accused of overreacting. A two-semester foreign language requirement still remains, and any students so inspired to continue on into the second-year classes will have every right and ability to do so. That is, as long as enrollment reaches acceptable levels to save the class from cancellation, as was cited with the disbandment of Arabic language classes last spring.

One year is not enough time to experience all the benefits of learning a foreign language. Truly, two years barely is. But with speed and practicality valued over depth, I’m afraid many students will now miss out on the positive experiences I’ve been fortunate enough to have under the two-year requirement.

I’ve heard rumor that faculty voted to lessen the requirement to lessen students’ burdens. A smaller language requirement may retain current students and entice prospective ones who might otherwise choose another school.

If this is true, then the language requirement has been lessened because of a fear of discouraging students. Unfortunately, at least in my case, this is exactly what happened anyway.