

# Foreign Languages in Higher Education in the US -- Issues and Advocacy

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*Foreign language learning has been disrupted by declining enrollments, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the benefits of languages are well known, few US students study another language. Beyond the decline in enrollment and lack of qualified language teachers, issues facing languages in US colleges and universities include the crisis in the humanities, the curriculum, and online learning. In a globalized world, the need for international education is evident. Advocacy is needed, including K-16 and interdisciplinary collaborations, to rebuild the number of foreign language learners so that there will be a sufficient number of students with the interests and skills to pursue pre-professional language studies at the postsecondary level. A national language policy would encourage language learning and reduce divisions within our increasingly multilingual society. The leadership role of faculty in making the case for languages, developing interdisciplinary and K-16 partnerships, supporting access to foreign language learning for all interested students from the earliest grade levels, and expanding the postsecondary foreign language curriculum to include multiple career pathways, is essential.*

*Keywords: foreign languages, advocacy, colleges and universities, higher education*

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign languages in US colleges and universities are at a historic turning point. Although facing declining enrollments and current budgetary challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign languages are more important than ever in the workplace. Trends and shift toward a more globalized and interconnected world, and in our increasingly multilingual society continue to accelerate unabated.

Nearly 70M in the US speak a language other than English in the home (CIS, 2019), and many Americans not only support foreign language learning in the classroom, but wish they had taken more foreign languages when they were students (AMACAD, 2020). The challenge is how to translate this support for foreign languages into the increased enrollment needed for sustainable foreign language programs at the college and university level.

The central issue is the lack of students enrolled in continued foreign language learning from the elementary and middle school level through high school, which results in an insufficient number of students arriving on college and university campuses with the interest, motivation, and skills needed for pre-professional foreign language learning. This lack of a sufficient marketing or enrollment funnel can prevent even the most relevant and student goal-oriented foreign language initiative from thriving. In addition, a decrease in the number of college-age students caused by the Great Recession and commonly referred to as the "birth dearth" or "enrollment cliff" is among the external factors impacting enrollment (Grawe, 2018; Barshay, 2018).

A two-pronged approach is needed, including short-term initiatives to increase enrollment through interdisciplinary collaborations, double majors, and joint programs on campus (MLA, 2019) and through collaboration with high school educators to bring high school students into college classes in order to reduce the threat of program closures (Nelson, 2020). Longer-term measures include building out the foreign language major to include multiple pathways to the major, and most importantly, the development of elementary and middle school programs to build the linguistic skills needed for pre-professional language learning at the postsecondary level (MLA, 2007). Although not unique to foreign language education, these dual pressures of dropping enrollment overall and a weak pipeline for foreign language learning present a serious challenge.

Foreign language faculty are at the heart of this resurgence of foreign languages, working to bring foreign languages to the whole of education, from the earliest grades through K-16 collaborations and through proactive advocacy, making the case for foreign languages in their classrooms and campuses and beyond, through their teaching and research, as well as their engagement in the advocacy initiatives of their professional associations and institutional and local communities (Jaumont, 2017). One approach that seems logical to emphasize how creativity and dynamic thinking in a multilingual, multilingual, and post-Covidian environment are essential traits.

Making the case for foreign languages through proactive advocacy includes making the full range of personal, professional, and societal benefits of the learning and use of additional languages known within higher education and to the public. The value proposition for the institution, which includes the relatively low cost of foreign language instruction and the demonstrated potential of immersion and online programs in terms of reputation as well as additional revenue, needs to be brought to the table by faculty leaders in any discussion (Middlebury, 2020; Concordia; Oregon State, 2020). Making the case for languages also involves examining and addressing the challenges facing foreign languages, which include curriculum, online learning, the crisis in the humanities, the current status of international education and study abroad, and need for a US language policy.

Action steps include increased foreign language advocacy, increased K-16 collaborations and support of elementary and middle school programs including both immersion and traditional FLES programs, and the implementation of a US language policy. There is an element of social equity in this step, as bilingualism has been shown to benefit low-income students the most (APS, 2012; Hu, 2018).

The data on the personal, professional, and societal benefits of foreign language skills is clear, and faculty have an essential role in making this information known on campus and beyond. Students, institutional decision-makers, and the general public look to foreign language faculty as the experts and thought leaders, and faculty are well positioned to lead a successful campaign for the resurgence of foreign languages in our colleges and universities, and in our society.

## **THE BENEFITS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

The benefits of foreign language learning and use include personal and professional benefits (ACTFL, 2019; ACTFL, n.d.; NAE, 2017; Fed, 2020), and multilingualism plays a role in the development of a global citizenship mindset and skills.

The career advantages of language skills are clear, and needs to be made known to students, parents, and institutional decision-makers. The need for bilingual workers at all levels has doubled in the last 5 years (NAE, 2017). Nine out of 10 US employers report a need for workers with language skills, with that number expected to continue to rapidly increase for both international and US business, with a gap between the supply and demand for language skills resulting in a loss of business for one in four US employers (ACTFL, 2019). In addition, foreign language majors are among the least likely to be unemployed (Fed, 2020). The global languages services sector alone is estimated at \$56.18 billion by 2021, with 3 of the top 5 language services companies headquartered in the US (Gala-Global, 2020). Employment opportunities for translators and interpreters are predicted to grow by 20%, or "much faster than average" in 2020-2029 (USBLS, 2020).

However, many college and university students are relatively unaware of these benefits. Skills in an additional language are especially beneficial to low-income students (Hu, 2018; APS, 2012). Reasons for

this relative lack of knowledge of the full array of foreign language benefits include the lack of foreign language programs in US public elementary and middle schools, the lack of foreign language requirements for high school graduation in several states, and the lack of college admission foreign language requirements in many colleges and universities (ECS, 2019; MLA, 2012). This relative invisibility of foreign languages in education in the US is a reflection of the relative absence of foreign language education and use in the public conversation generally. In a sense, it is a vicious circle, with the relatively small number of US K-12 students learning another language leading to an even smaller number of students with language skills and a potential interest in language learning at the college and university level.

In addition to the career benefits, it is also necessary to educate language learners and prospective language learners, as well as community and institutional partners and decision-makers as to the personal benefits of languages, including cultural, cognitive and academic benefits. Perhaps most importantly, it is necessary to highlight the need for foreign language as a global competency, part of the skills set needed to effectively address complex global issues, as well as the increasing importance of additional languages in strengthening solidarity and reducing segmentation in multilingual communities throughout the US. The Oui! Initiative, in which businesses in Lafayette, Louisiana, offer and promote service in French is just one example (Gagliano, 2019).

Foreign language advocacy is key to increasing the profile of languages on college and university campuses, in schools, and in our communities. Beyond educators, language stakeholders and potential advocacy partners include heritage language speakers as well as government and business. The social benefits of multilingualism, not only in developing an international and global citizenship mindset, but also in increasing appreciation and understanding within our multilingual society, are important and part of the mission of education.

## **THE CURRENT STATUS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN US COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Foreign language enrollments at the postsecondary level have declined precipitously over the past 60 years as well as within the most recent period measured (MLA, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Bauman, 2021), resulting in a discussion of the causes and of effective strategies to strengthen foreign language programs, even those which have not been impacted at this time. Possible causes include a general lack of interest in foreign language learning among US students, who may believe that English is the global *lingua franca* (AMACAD, 2017) and therefore, sufficient, a mistaken assumption as 75% of the world population does not speak English (British Council, 2013). Another commonly-mentioned cause is an impression among many that foreign language skills and cultural knowledge may not be as valuable in the workplace as other pre-professional areas. However, demand for bilingual workers has more than doubled in the US in the last 5 years (NAE, 2017), and demand exceeds supply of workers with knowledge of other languages among US employers (ACTFL, 2019). In addition, foreign language majors are among the least likely to be unemployed (FED, 2020).

Foreign languages in the US are impacted by several external trends. On the one hand, while there may be a crisis within the humanities, foreign languages are among those areas within the humanities that enjoy relative support among the public both in terms of learning and use (Redden, 2020; AMACAD, 2020). However, support is strongest for learning at an early age rather than at the college and university level (AMACAD, 2020), pointing to a need to strengthen existing K-16 collaborations and to establish additional partnerships and curriculum/career pathways.

There is also a strong business case to be made for foreign languages, yet there may be a lack of awareness among college and university students, their parents, institutional decision-makers, and the general public of the return on investment (ROI) in terms of the demand for language skills and employability in the US marketplace in a wide variety of areas and ranging from entry-level to leadership positions (NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019; Fed, 2020).

Perhaps the most obvious societal trend impacting foreign language learning is the exponential increase in online learning, already significant in higher education and beyond, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A

recent survey of undergraduate students indicates growing satisfaction among college and university students (Lederman, 2020). In the short-term, this has resulted in the need for both educators and institutions to re-think curriculum and pedagogy, but is resulting in increased availability of foreign language programs to a broader base of students who may not be traditional students or who may not be able to, or choose to, attend traditional on-campus classes. A quick scan of online language learning beyond college campuses shows the strong popularity of online language learning in the language school sector, with estimates of the global market for online language learning as high as \$21B (PRNewswire, 2020; Meticulous, 2020). Although Rosetta Stone is not specifically a college and university initiative, its revenue and revenue increase 7% year over year to \$49.2 million in the current cycle (GlobalNewswire, 2020) reflect the huge and growing popularity of online learning generally. Beyond the factors impacting the whole of education, foreign languages are also impacted specifically by additional trends, such as the current limitations on travel and study abroad, necessitating the development and implementation of additional online strands of international learning.

Challenges facing foreign language learning in the US also include less readily visible factors such as a national shortage of qualified foreign language teachers (USDOE, 2017) and a decline in the number of foreign language programs in elementary and middle schools, especially in public schools, in the US (AMACAD, 2017), resulting in a decreasing number of students arriving on college campuses with either interest in languages or the skills needed to develop the pre-professional language skills needed to use languages effectively in the workplace. It also means that fewer students have the opportunity to learn another language, especially public school students who would include students from low-income family shown most likely to benefit from bilingualism (APS, 2012; Hu, 2018). The general decline in enrollment in the humanities in US institutions of higher education may also play a role in the decline in foreign language enrollment on US campuses.

## **THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

In order to effectively address these challenges, a strategic approach is needed, including collaborations within the institution, within the broader K-16 educational community, and with foreign language stakeholders ranging from government officials and prospective employers to community members in both the local communities and among alumni. However, as the scholars and experts on foreign language at any institution, it is the foreign language faculty who are best qualified to play a leadership role in any postsecondary foreign language initiative or campaign.

The Modern Language Association report, *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World*, which has framed the current conversation on foreign languages in US colleges and universities, provided a road map for change (MLA, 2007). Its recommendations included multiple pathways to the major, interdisciplinary collaborations, strengthening foreign language departments within the institution, as well as collaborations with K-12 foreign language programs. However, while its recommendations are generally known among the foreign language educators at the college and university level, they had not been as widely implemented, even at the 10th anniversary of its publication (Lomicka & Lord, 2018; Redden, 2017).

Furthermore, the situation has deteriorated yet further, and in its most recent enrollment report, the MLA found that 651 foreign language programs (as defined by the report) had been lost in the most recent 3-year period studied, that French -- the second most frequently studied language in the US -- had been the most severely impacted, and that for the first time, Spanish -- by far the most frequently studied language in the US -- had been negatively impacted (MLA, 2019).

## **ISSUES FACING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN US COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES -- THE CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES, THE CURRICULUM, AND ONLINE LEARNING**

### **The Crisis in the Humanities**

In its survey of US attitudes toward the humanities, foreign languages hold a position of relative importance, with many viewing knowledge of other languages favorably and supporting foreign language learning from the earliest grade levels (AMACAD, 2020). On the other hand, college enrollment overall, including in the humanities and foreign languages, faces the impact of the birth dearth, or enrollment cliff, the decline in the US birth rate in recent years, which will result in fewer students of college age by 2025 (Grawe, 2018; Barshay, 2018). Enrollment in the humanities has declined in recent years, as has enrollment in foreign languages. Foreign language enrollment declined significantly in the 1970's and 80's, prior to the presence of globalization in the public conversation, then enjoyed a period of relative stability until recent years, with a significant decline noted in recent MLA enrollment reports (MLA, 2019, Johnson, 2019; Bauman, 2021).

While this has caused serious concerns among foreign language educators, particularly among college and university foreign language faculty, there are numerous ways of effectively addressing the enrollment issue. These include participation in the discussion of the humanities and in making their value more widely known and understood among students and parents, as well as among institutional leaders and the broader public.

However, there are also many methods of re-envisioning the foreign language curriculum at the post-secondary level so that, while retaining a humanities pathway to the major and to graduate studies, additional curricular pathways may be developed. These additional pathways can respond to student interests, in global and international studies, international relations and law, international business, global health, etc. through interdisciplinary collaborations, double majors, and joint programs. In addition, language curriculum can be expanded to include pre-professional programs leading to careers in language services and beyond. Faculty training and recruitment can play a role here, broadening the expertise available within the foreign language department.

### **The Curriculum**

In order to effectively address the challenges facing foreign languages in US colleges and universities, it is necessary to examine the curriculum and to determine if existing foreign language majors and course offerings meet the needs of current students. Strengthening those courses most closely aligned with student needs and aspirations is a first step, with the development of additional courses either within the department or in interdisciplinary collaboration (MLA, 2019). Courses developed within the department can build on the interests and expertise of existing faculty, and new areas can be introduced and developed through faculty training or recruitment of faculty with expertise in new areas. Interdisciplinary collaborations can range from team teaching and additional reading and research modules in the target language to study abroad and study away experiences designed to develop additional student skills. K-16 collaborations, including dual enrollment, can bring motivated high school students into college-level courses, providing both enrichment to the high school student and enrollment to the college department (Nelson, 2020). Online learning has the potential to expand enrollment by making foreign language study available to students in a more flexible manner, enabling those who cannot or choose not to attend traditional classes on campus to develop skills needed in the workplace, to achieve a lifelong dream of fluency in another language, or even to earn an undergraduate or graduate degree in a foreign language.

### **Online Learning**

Within the context of foreign language teaching and learning, it is important to consider the increasing importance of online learning. The proliferation of authentic foreign language material available to learners and to educators freely online, including movies, media, and text, as well as social media is only part of the picture, however, with an increasing number of foreign language learning resources available both within educational institutions and beyond, developed and provided by a wide range of entities. It is also important

to include the proliferation on online learning platforms developed to support and augment the traditional foreign language textbook. In addition, entire college and university-level programs are available online (Oregon, 2020).

This new and evolving learning environment offers possibilities for expanding foreign language learning, even in terms of undergraduate and graduate degrees to a broader audience, but also requires agility on the part of the foreign language educator, in order to incorporate online learning platforms, video-conferencing technology, etc. in both synchronous and asynchronous settings.

The shift to an online model of teaching and learning, already accelerating, has been impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a rapid shift to -- in many cases -- totally online virtual instruction. While this is certainly a logistical challenge, it also opens the door for proactive institutions willing to evolve and change with the marketplace.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGES, STUDY ABROAD, AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

Foreign languages and international education would appear to be likely partners in higher education. Foreign languages enhance cultural learning both during study abroad and within the context of global learning on campus, and large numbers of international students attend US universities as undergraduate and graduate students.

Paradoxically, many US students study abroad with little prior knowledge of the language and culture of the host country, and many of their study abroad experiences may occur either in classes taught in English, or in social settings with other English-speaking students. Challenges would include diversification of study abroad locations, and increased use of the local language during study abroad. Global learning on campus -- film festivals, course readings in languages other than English, and participation in international discussions -- are also greatly enhanced by knowledge of additional languages. Yet foreign language proficiency is not required in many undergraduate majors whose students consider study abroad, and many study abroad experiences take place largely in English. Increased foreign language study prior to study abroad would enhance the authenticity and return on investment (ROI) of the study abroad experience in terms of both linguistic skill and cultural knowledge.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) brings yet another interdisciplinary perspective to the cultural learning that is generally part of foreign language learning as it highlights the active use of cultural knowledge in personal and professional life and the development of a individual plan for learning. This personal empowerment of the student may also increase the appeal of foreign language study (Livermore, 2011; Livermore, 2015).

Many international students attend US universities, either to perfect their English or to earn an undergraduate or graduate degree, yet many of those who welcome international students to US campus and provide services to them do not speak a language other than English. The ability of US colleges and universities to enroll and to retain international students could well be increased if key and front-line faculty and staff had more knowledge of the languages and cultures of current and prospective students.

## **LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

College and university foreign language departments, while embedded in their institutions, are also part of the larger public conversation about education in general and foreign languages specifically. Beyond encouraging the study of other languages, a language policy would also foster multiculturalism and a more inclusive society.

Unlike the status of languages and language learning in many countries, in the US there is actually no official language and no language policy to support the learning and use of additional languages. An overview of language learning in the EU, where language learning is the norm rather than the exception (Devlin, 2018), reveals the potential impact of a language policy in the US in terms of continued study of one or more additional languages from the earliest grade levels.

However, while a US language policy supporting and/or requiring the learning of additional languages would arguably result in a vastly larger number of K-12 students enrolled in foreign languages, leading to

a greater number of students arriving on college campuses language-ready, with the motivation and skills needed for the development of pre-professional language skills across the disciplines, the role of government extends far beyond the eventual enactment of a US language policy.

US government reports and Congressional hearings have re-confirmed the importance of foreign language skills in all branches of government, including diplomacy and the military (Feds, 2017). In recent years, two Federal initiatives have demonstrated this need to build US language capacity, the critical languages initiative in the years following 9/11, and the recent initiative announced by US Department of State (Capriccioso, 2006; State Dept, 2020).

External support, while essential, needs to be carefully planned and managed by foreign language faculty and their institutions. Examples of effective external support in higher education would include the initiative to offer training to French language faculty in teaching professional French launched by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and the joint sponsorship of the Tulane French language job fair Cultural Services, 2019, 2019a).

## **THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY**

"Advocacy means persuading people who matter to care about your issue. It is about getting listened to, being at the table when decisions are made, being heard by people who make decisions" (Daly, 2011). In addition to their traditional roles as scholars and teachers, faculty need to embrace an additional role as foreign language advocates in their classrooms, on campus, and through their research, writing, and professional engagement. Enrollments are down, programs are at risk (MLA, 2019), and faculty are not only the experts in their discipline and within shared governance, but are also those to whom students look to for advice and guidance.

With foreign language enrollment currently on the decline at the college and university level, the relatively small percentage of K-12 students (fewer than 20%) has resulted in a proportionately smaller pool of students arriving on college and university campus with foreign language motivation and skills, a marketing funnel too small to sustain thriving foreign language undergraduate and graduate programs.

In order to reverse this trend, to develop interest in languages and language learning as well as to develop the skills necessary for pre-professional foreign language programs at the college and university level, it is necessary for language stakeholders to focus their efforts on K-12 programs, particularly those at the elementary and middle school levels which are themselves diminishing in number (AMACAD, 2017). Perhaps most importantly, it is a question of providing opportunity for all our students to develop these language skills that have been demonstrated to provide benefits in so many areas throughout our lives.

Advocacy "is about facing and overcoming resistance. It is about speaking and writing in compelling ways that make decision makers want to adopt your ideas" (Daly, 2011). At the postsecondary level, it must be especially focused on two areas -- both short and medium-term goals in order to prevent the program closures that are a real threat in many institutions, and longer-term goals intended to increase the number of students at the elementary and middle school levels studying foreign languages in order to develop a larger pool of potential postsecondary language learners, which would go a long way toward ensuring the sustainability of foreign language programs -- majors, double majors, and minors, as well as foreign language and joint programs at the graduate level.

K-16 and interdisciplinary partnerships are especially important, as are the partnerships with parents and communities that have been so effective in driving the growth of immersion programs. Immersion, long known to be the most effective methodology in teaching and learning another language, in conjunction with the motivation of heritage learners and their families in preserving a family or heritage language, can be leveraged to increase opportunity and achievement, and multidisciplinary pathways for immersion learners and heritage speakers are longer-term goals that can be initiated by motivated educators (Fortune, 2019).

Foreign languages should be treated as a long term investment with a real return on investment (ROI), and not as a short term expense or inconvenience. In addition to all of the benefits foreign languages bring to the individual learner and to society in general, the value proposition as well as the cost structure of

foreign language programs and the cost per student need to be considered by college and university administrators. Foreign language courses generally do not require expensive labs and equipment, and many of the instructors are contingent faculty, typically earning less than tenure-track faculty. In addition, summer immersion programs and summer language campus for pre-college students are a potential source of revenue, with Middlebury and Concordia among the best-known examples. Beyond the summer, language houses in student residence halls offer an opportunity to fill residence spaces that may otherwise be unoccupied. Corporate and group programs have the potential to fill unused residence space, and online programs may be offered year-round.

## **THE ROAD AHEAD -- CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Against the backdrop of a decline in enrollment at the college and university level, and a decrease in the number of foreign language programs in public elementary and middle schools in the US, the global COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education and learning at all levels around the world (UNESCO, 2020).

In the US, the current situation has been impacted both in terms of budgets and in terms of access (Hubler, 2020; Mitchell, 2020). While public and private postsecondary institutions have faced challenges in terms of revenue lost due to the smaller number of students on campuses, public institutions are generally at least partially dependent on local and state funding, just as these cities, counties, and states face budget challenges themselves due to the pandemic and its repercussions. Students without reliable access to the internet and without the appropriate devices for learning and/or the appropriate study and learning environment at home face challenges in accessing online instruction and virtual learning resources.

An existing shortage of qualified K-12 foreign language teachers impacts colleges and universities in terms of lack of faculty with the expertise necessary to teach pre-professional language skills and in terms of pressures on foreign language departments dependent on a dwindling number of new and recent PhDs to fill vacant faculty positions and often forced to rely largely on contingent faculty.

Recruitment of foreign language faculty from other countries, while beneficial in terms of depth of linguistic and cultural knowledge of mother tongue speakers as foreign language teachers, can also result in administrative obstacles including visas as well as some adjustment as faculty educated outside the US may need to adjust to the teaching and learning styles and expectations of US students. Cultural and linguistic authenticity are counter-balanced by a potential lack of stability if educators are not able to be admitted and to remain employed in the US permanently. An example of this would be the challenges faced by French and Spanish immersion teachers in Louisiana as they were scheduled to enter the US in summer 2020 (Thiery, 2020).

Increasing interest and enrollments in foreign language programs is essential, and collaborations are key to success. Potential collaborations include interdisciplinary and K-16 collaborations, and double majors should be encouraged and supported. Interdisciplinary collaborations can include team-teaching, use of foreign language readings as supplementary modules to courses otherwise taught in English, and the development of joint programs at the graduate level. K-16 collaborations can include not only support of traditional FLES models, but also active support of immersion programs and teacher training.

The most serious challenge, however, facing postsecondary foreign language programs is the relatively small number of students -- approximately 20% -- studying a foreign language in US public schools. Lack of interest in other languages, and in many cases, a lack of opportunity for many students to begin continued study of another language at the earliest grade levels results in an insufficient number of students with language skills and an interest in developing pre-professional language skills on our college campuses. In a sense, college and university foreign language programs suffer from an unfavorable market funnel.

In order to reverse this decline in enrollment, foreign language programs need to expand their curricula to include interdisciplinary and K-12 collaborations, double major opportunities, and joint degree programs, while at the same time addressing the lack of opportunity for US elementary school students -- only 15% of public elementary schools offer foreign languages -- to start learning languages at an early age in order to develop the interest and skills needed to support this new model of undergraduate and graduate curriculum.



In addition to these changes, time is of the essence, as programs are rapidly disappearing and unlikely to be re-started.

Most importantly, there is a question of equity and fairness involved, as while bilingualism has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on students generally, this impact is most considerable in the case of low-income students -- those who need educational support the most and are most likely to attend public elementary schools which, paradoxically, are the least likely to offer foreign languages. Societal inequity can be partially addressed by redressing this opportunity gap.

## CONCLUSIONS

Foreign language learning has been disrupted, most recently by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is necessary to turn current challenges into opportunities, making the importance of multilingualism part of the conversation on our campuses, in our communities, and in our media. Students, parents, and decision-makers need to be made aware of the benefits of foreign language skills and cultural knowledge in both personal and professional life. Curriculum needs to reflect both the multiplicity of reasons for learning a language and the multiplicity of uses for language skills in the workplace, in our society, and in the globalized world. Faculty are the leaders in educating not only students, but also parents, institutional leaders, and the general public on these advantages and uses and in creating the curriculum, career pathways, and partnerships to bring about a resurgence in foreign languages in our colleges and universities.

Despite the relative lack of language learning opportunities and resulting lack of foreign language skills in the US, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated just how globalized and interconnected the world has become. It is to be hoped that, from this health crisis, awareness of the need for linguistic skills and knowledge of other cultures will increase, leading to an increase in interest in foreign languages among US students, parents, and education decision-makers at all levels.

At the same time, while awaiting the arrival of a new generation of students with both the motivation and skills needed in order to develop pre-professional language skills, college and university faculty can act to bring about change, providing multiple pathways to the major, developing double major pathways, building interdisciplinary and joint programs, and working to increase support for foreign languages within their institutions (MLA, 2007).

Faculty continue to be the heart of a resurgence of foreign languages in US colleges and universities, and foreign language faculty need and deserve the support of their professional associations, their peers across the disciplines, their institutional administrators, and of all language stakeholders. Data-driven advocacy and faculty willingness to proactively engage students, parents, institutional and other language stakeholders in an ongoing conversation and to build multiple pathways to the major and to graduate degrees, as well as to careers are the keys to success.

Even as the world has become increasingly interconnected and globalized, fewer and fewer US college and university students are studying other languages. Following a period of relative stability after an earlier precipitous decline in enrollments, over 650 foreign language programs have been lost in the most recent years. This trend has been exacerbated by the by budgetary and other challenges facing higher education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The acceleration of the already-existing transition to online language learning at the beginning levels as a result of the current health crisis has caused additional stress to educators and learners alike.

Foreign language skills and cultural knowledge provide not only personal, cultural, and cognitive benefits, but are also assets in the workplace in many fields and at all levels of employment, and this trend is increasing not only in terms of international trade and commerce, but also in terms of providing products and services to an increasingly multilingual US.

Curriculum needs to be expanded in order to include pre-professional language skills, and this can begin well before college in order to increase awareness of the career value of foreign language skills.

Turning challenges into opportunities, faculty can show the way and lead programs into the future.

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