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## **NEW MLA SURVEY REPORT FINDS THAT THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH IS GROWING AND DIVERSIFYING AT US COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

### **Comprehensive nationwide report shows significant increases in the study of Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and American Sign Language**

(New York, NY) – Enrollments in languages other than English at US institutions of higher education have continued to grow over the past decade and are diversifying to include an increasingly broad range of language studies, according to a comprehensive new report, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009*, released today by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA). The survey responses indicated significant increases in enrollments in nearly all the languages most studied on US college campuses since 2006, the date of the previous MLA report on language course enrollments.

The MLA report is the longest-running and most comprehensive analysis of the study of languages other than English at US colleges and universities. The MLA has produced this survey since 1958, with the continuous support of the US Department of Education; this is the twenty-second survey in the series. The report includes undergraduate and graduate course enrollments in languages other than English in fall 2009 for 2,514 AA-, BA-, MA-, and PhD-granting colleges and universities in the United States. These 2,514 institutions represent 99.0% of all higher education institutions offering language courses in the United States.

The new survey found that the study of Arabic registered the largest percentage growth at US colleges and universities since the previous MLA report. Enrollments in Arabic language courses grew by 46.3% between 2006 and 2009, building on an increase of 126.5% in Arabic enrollments in the previous MLA survey, the first in which the language appeared among the ten most studied at US colleges and universities. Arabic is now the eighth most studied foreign language at US colleges and universities, up from tenth in 2006. Also registering significant increases in enrollments in the new MLA survey are Korean (up 19.1%), Chinese (up 18.2%), American Sign Language (ASL) (up 16.4%), Portuguese (up 10.8%), and Japanese (up 10.3%).

Enrollments in languages outside the fifteen most commonly taught, classified in this report as less commonly taught languages, or LCTLs, grew by 20.8% between 2006 and 2009, following a gain of 31.2% between 2002 and 2006. The number of LCTLs studied at US colleges and universities also grew by 19.2% between 2006 and 2009. In all, 217 LCTLs were offered for study in 2009, 35 more than in 2006.

"It's gratifying to see that so many US students recognize the importance of language study for our future," said MLA Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. "The demand for an ever-greater range of languages demonstrates the vitality of the field. Despite troubling cutbacks in language

offerings at some institutions, this report shows that overall interest in language study remains strong at US colleges and universities."

The new survey found that the ratio of enrollments in modern language courses to overall college and university student enrollments remained unchanged since 2006, at 8.6 per 100 total enrollments. This figure is significantly lower than the high of 16.5 enrollments per 100 overall enrollments registered in 1965 but is also well above the low point of 7.3 enrollments per 100 overall found in 1980. The decline in the enrollment ratio since 1965 may be explained by a decline in language requirements at US colleges and universities as well as by an expansion in the number of disciplines studied.

This survey in the MLA series also includes new features designed to increase the value of the information reported. It now breaks down language enrollments in all fifty states, and survey data has been added to the MLA Language Map, allowing visitors to the map to see where languages are taught and to observe language programs in the context of where languages are spoken in the United States.

### Key Findings from the Report

Following are some of the key findings of the new report, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009*.

- Course enrollments in languages other than English reached a new high in 2009. Enrollments grew by 6.6% between 2006 and 2009, following an expansion of 12.9% between 2002 and 2006. This increase continues a rise in enrollment in languages other than English that began in 1995.
- The most studied languages on college campuses in fall 2009 were

<u>Language</u>	<u>Enrollments</u>	<u>Change since 2006</u>
1. Spanish	864,986	+ 5.1%
2. French	216,419	+ 4.8%
3. German	96,349	+ 2.2%
4. ASL	91,763	+ 16.4%
5. Italian	80,752	+ 3.0%
6. Japanese	73,434	+ 10.3%
7. Chinese	60,976	+ 18.2%
8. Arabic	35,083	+ 46.3%
9. Latin	32,606	+ 1.3%
10. Russian	26,883	+ 8.2%
11. Ancient Greek	20,695	- 9.4% <sup>1</sup>
12. Biblical Hebrew	13,807	- 2.4%
13. Portuguese	11,371	+ 10.8%
14. Korean	8,511	+ 19.1%
15. Modern Hebrew	8,245	- 14.2%

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<sup>1</sup> The decline in enrollments in Ancient Greek (- 9.4%) likely results from the reframing of categories in premodern Greek courses in a handful of institutions.

The list of “top ten” languages studied has shifted only slightly since 2006.

- Spanish, French, and German are still the three most studied languages, followed by American Sign Language (ASL), which jumped to fourth in the 2006 survey and held that position in 2009.
  - Italian, Japanese, and Chinese come next, in the same sequence they have occupied since 1998.
  - Arabic continues to draw increasing numbers of enrollments, jumping two positions since 2006 to eighth, now ahead of Latin and Russian.
- The most studied languages (Spanish, French, and German) continue to gain in enrollments, but at a slower pace than some other languages.
  - In two-year colleges, enrollments in Arabic, ASL, Chinese, Hawaiian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, and Vietnamese all showed increases both long-term between 1990 and 2009 and short-term between 2006 and 2009. The inclusion of Vietnamese and Hawaiian among the top fourteen languages taught in two-year colleges and their absence among the top languages in four-year institutions may reflect the unique mission of community colleges serving the needs of local populations.

“The increase in studying American Sign Language is linked with a growing awareness that ASL is a fully developed, autonomous, human language,” said Kristen Harmon, professor of English at Gallaudet University. “Students find that studying an indigenous American language gives them another perspective on American life and culture. Those who receive advanced training and certification in sign language interpreting will also find that there is demand for highly qualified interpreters in education, government, and business.”

“Language study remains a central element of a well-rounded education,” said Russell A. Berman, first vice president of the MLA and professor of German studies and comparative literature at Stanford University. “Yet while student interest in languages grows, program cutbacks are threatening access to the study of languages students need to communicate effectively in an increasingly multicultural world. America’s colleges and universities should use the findings of this report as a basis to strengthen and protect rather than reduce their commitment to language study.”

## **Methodology**

The new MLA survey counts fall 2009 undergraduate and graduate course enrollments in languages other than English at 2,514 AA-, BA-, MA-, and PhD-granting colleges and universities in the United States. The 2,514 institutions covered in the survey account for 99.0% of all higher education institutions offering languages in the United States. Approximately one-third of the responses came from two-year colleges and two-thirds from four-year institutions.

To conduct the survey, the MLA contacted registrars and other school representatives by mail, telephone, and e-mail. The MLA database was supplemented with information from the National Center for Education Statistics to ensure that all eligible institutions were accounted for.

The survey measures course enrollments, not the number of students studying a language. One student may enroll in more than one language course. The ratio of language course enrollments to total students is, however, a figure that, over time, can serve as an important indicator of the study of languages in US higher education.

## **About the Modern Language Association**

The Modern Language Association of America and its 30,000 members in 100 countries work to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literature. Founded in 1883, the MLA provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. The MLA sustains one of the finest publication programs in the humanities, producing about twelve new books a year and a variety of publications for language and literature professionals and for the public. The MLA Language Map and its Data Center provide information about more than 47,000,000 people in the United States who speak languages other than English at home. The 2011 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Los Angeles, January 6–9. For more information please visit [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org).

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