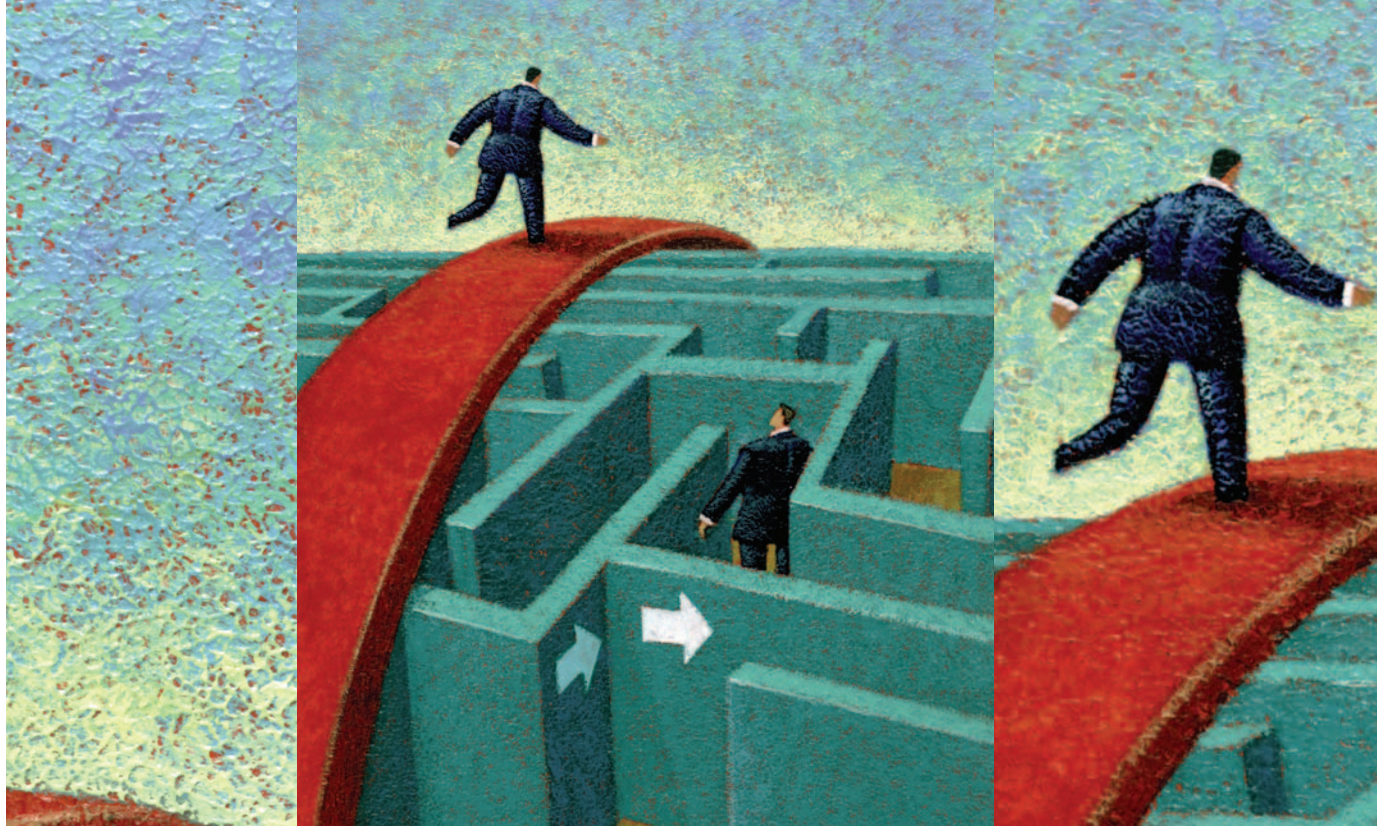


Effective Local, National, and World Citizenship

In addition to providing you with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary in the workplace, the study of languages, literatures, and cultures, like the study of history, philosophy, or mathematics, helps you develop the analytic skills needed to be an effective participant in local and national discussions. Studying languages in the context of history, politics, and popular culture can help you follow international events with insight, opening up perspectives to make you an informed and responsible citizen of your country and of the world.

Language and the Internet

Language study introduces you to new realms of ideas, customs, habits, and values. In both professional and personal ways, the twenty-first century places demands on people's global knowledge. As the Internet has changed the way we think about the transfer of information, so has it eliminated the sense of distance between us and the citizens of other countries. Materials from around the world, for both business and pleasure, are available to every person who has access to a computer. Diverse cultures in contact with one another can create unprecedented opportunities for exchange, cooperation, and mutual benefit. International contacts are an integral part of many careers, and people without the skill and sensitivity to deal with other cultures are at a disadvantage.



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Educators, advisers, and parents may obtain individual copies or packets of twenty of this brochure at no charge by writing the Office of Foreign Language Programs at the MLA; languagebrochure@mla.org. This brochure may be duplicated.

Language Study in the Age of Globalization

The College-Level Experience

KNOWING another language enriches your personal life, expands the range of professional opportunities open to you, and increases your power to act as a citizen of the world. At the college level you can begin a new language or build on your knowledge of a language that you have already studied. College may also be the first chance you will have to study languages such as Russian, Chinese, Japanese, or Arabic. Forget the myth that you have to learn languages as a child: in the classroom young adults can be faster and more effective learners than small children.

Improved Career Prospects

Competition for the best jobs and for admission to top-rated graduate and professional schools is intense. Directly and indirectly the study of languages and their cultures and literatures will provide you with important job-related knowledge and skills that can give you a competitive edge. These include the ability to solve problems and to think analytically and creatively, to communicate effectively and confidently in writing and in person, and to act with versatility and flexibility. Leaders and decision makers must be able to access information, to understand it, and to interpret it critically; linguistic and cultural knowledge is essential to meeting these challenges. Because you can communicate and connect with people of other cultures and nationalities, you will be able to establish and maintain personal and professional contacts. In business, any cross-cultural effort for cooperation, sales, or negotiation will benefit from your experience of other languages and their communities. To be an effective professional, such as a doctor, lawyer, educator, artist, or scientist, communicating and investigating new knowledge in other languages as well as in English are essential in the increasingly international workplace. Exposure to another culture through its language will position you more favorably for success in your career, whatever career you may choose.



A Life-Enriching Experience

Perhaps the greatest benefit of language study is an expanded understanding of diverse, culturally rooted attitudes and behaviors. We cannot begin to imagine how much ethnic and cultural values differ until we gain access from the inside, through language. Language preserves the history and traditions of a people, through speakers' common understanding of the meanings of words, expressions, and texts. Only on a foundation of such insider knowledge can cultural understanding be achieved.

Studying even one language will dramatically increase your sensitivity to linguistic and cultural difference; it will make you more aware of how you use your own language as well. Many people who study languages and cultures are surprised to find the experience transformative. Students of language discover ways of seeing the world that they did not suspect. For some, developing knowledge of a second language and culture is like expanding one's personality, acquiring options that are both enriching and liberating. Some students find particular satisfaction in reading texts and hearing stories in the original language, in experiencing authors in their own voices. Others gain a sense of achievement from being able to participate more fully in national and international politics and events.

Special pleasure can be found in greater access to foreign films, music, and the arts. Even if your knowledge of a language is not extensive, you will find that you enjoy more when you understand meaning in the original; knowing about cultural context will give you greater access to what is communicated by intonation, body language, or phrasing. This access will enrich your travel to other countries, as you are able to interpret meanings in words and behaviors similar to or unlike your own.

While you gain an appreciation for the world outside your own, contact with other cultures will give you new perspectives on your own language, culture, and society. The comparisons that you can make between your language and the one you learn will lead to a greater

understanding of the nature of language itself. If you already speak a language other than English at home, you can study it at an intermediate or advanced level in college. Knowing two languages will give you a real advantage in starting a third at the college level.

What to Expect from College Language Studies

Although your progress may not always seem fast, each step is significant. Remember, languages are not learned all at once: your speaking, reading, listening, and writing will improve at different rates and will depend on what tasks you are learning to accomplish. Many college programs are adopting innovative ways of teaching language that involve the use of computers and the Internet and involve making connections with students in other countries. You might be interacting with a Web site, analyzing current events through the newspaper of another country, watching and discussing a film, performing in a play, listening to the radio, reading or writing about a literary text, or debating or chatting by e-mail with a student in a school in another country. You may be able to use your language in courses such as history, economics, biology, or business. You may become involved in a research project with your professors in which you use materials in the language you are studying. The degree of your success will depend on your motivation and hard work. In addition, you will be learning how to learn a language; with that ability, your next one will be easier.

Living the Language: Study Abroad, Internships Abroad and in the Local Community

Students who go abroad enlarge their opportunity to experience language and culture firsthand. You might have the chance to discuss French cinema with a French film student at La Cinémathèque Française in Paris, learn about the history of the Chinese empire on a visit to Beijing, observe the Day of the Dead with your peers in Mexico City, or just talk about everyday life in the language of your host country with the family where you live or with new friends.

There are hundreds of affordable study-abroad programs available to college students from many disciplines. They range from intensive short-term travel and study programs to studying in connection with a foreign university for a semester or year. Internships or volunteer and service-learning work is often available in other countries and even locally. Study-abroad programs offer students the chance for a face-to-face encounter with another culture, often under the auspices of a United States academic institution or consortium.

Basic language competency is a prerequisite for study abroad in most non-English-speaking countries. Once in the country of your choice, you will find that what you learned in the classroom will be activated; you will be able to read, to understand and converse with people. As returning students put it, "You have to use the language every day: your language capacity will expand incredibly."

Students who have gone abroad frequently report that the experience changed their life. Many establish lifetime friendships or contacts that turn into important professional connections later on. Increasingly, employers look for this kind of international experience in job applicants. You can find out about programs available to you through your language department or in your institution's study-abroad office. And remember also that there are communities right here in the United States where languages other than English are frequently spoken. You may be able to find opportunities to immerse yourself in another language without international travel, in a neighborhood very close to your own.

Fluency

Will you be fluent? Fluency has many meanings. After three or four years of study, depending on the language and the degree of intensity of study, you should be able to express your thoughts, follow your interests, and deal with topics of some intellectual complexity. The more you use the language, the more fluent you will become. Even a little fluency, such as facility with greetings and other social formulas, will go a long way toward making people feel that you are interested in meeting them on their own ground.

What Language Should I Study?

The answer to this question depends on your personal goals, but whether you think of languages primarily for career enhancement or for personal, cultural, and intellectual enrichment, any language is a rewarding choice. If your objective is international business, you can find out which countries are now or may become trading partners of the United States and Canada. If you want adventure, you could pick a language from a part of the world where you would like to travel. Or if you want to go back to your roots, you could learn about your grandparents or their parents by acquiring or adding to your knowledge of their language, their culture, and their world. Every language has something to say to you, and you have something to say in every language.

