

courses can replace a long list of “global competency” requirement course options.

- Partnering with nearby institutions to form consortia and share courses.
- Using ACTA’s [Map of Foreign Language Program Graduates](#) to identify language degree programs at nearby institutions for possible partnerships.
- Ensuring that language courses focus on practical application and in-depth cultural content and include objective assessment through external measures such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview.

Since 2009, ACTA’s **What Will They Learn?**® project has advocated for all college students to take a required course in intermediate-level foreign language as part of a robust liberal arts education.

To learn more about revitalizing foreign language study in higher education, scan the QR code to read *Ivory Tower of Babel*.

Scan the QR code:



ABOUT US



The **American Council of Trustees and Alumni** (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America’s colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price. Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over **1,300** colleges and universities, including over **23,000** current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over **15,000** readers.

ACTA’s **What Will They Learn?**® project is the only college rating system that examines the course catalogs of over 1,100 colleges and universities to provide an urgently needed assessment based on an institution’s core curriculum, the program of study that all students share. ACTA’s research team also collects data on several indicators that predict student success after college, including student-to-faculty ratios, campus-specific student loan default rates, graduation rates, the state of free expression on campus, and cost of attendance. Visit **WhatWillTheyLearn.com**.

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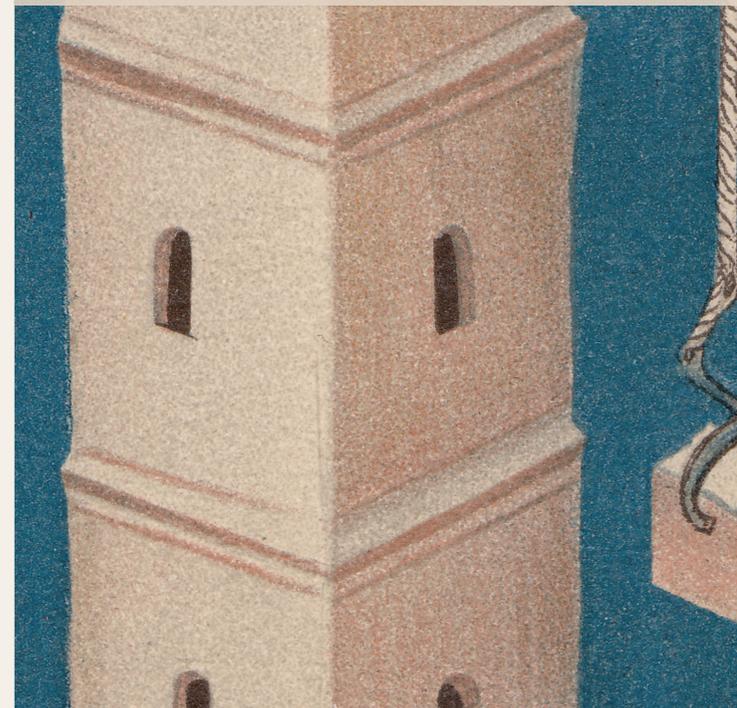
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Why America Needs Foreign Language Education at Its Colleges and Universities

Excerpts from ACTA’s report **Ivory Tower of Babel**



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI





Why America Needs Foreign Language Education at Its Colleges and Universities

Since the colonial period, American higher education has prioritized foreign language study in both classical and modern languages. Yet in the twenty-first century, the United States faces a shortfall of professionals with strong language skills, jeopardizing both national security and global competitiveness. Eighty percent of Americans are monolingual, compared to only 25% of Europeans. A 2020 report by the Council on Foreign Relations showed that 15% of overseas positions requiring language proficiency are vacant, and 24% are filled by officers with insufficient language training. One out of four U.S. employers reports losing business because of lack of language skills on staff.

Research has shown that foreign language study increases compensation and helps shape successful, resilient individuals who strengthen the fabric of our society.

- Since the Cold War, the federal government has prioritized hiring citizens with foreign language proficiency, since they provide essential information and build critical relationships for the U.S. intelligence service, military, and diplomatic corps.
- In the private sector, job postings offer multilinguals 19% more compensation than monolinguals, and Indeed.com lists “translation” as the fifth most in-demand job skill.

- In one 2018 survey, nine out of ten American employers of all sizes reported relying on U.S.-based employees who knew languages other than English in their business operations.
- Language learning improves executive function, logical decision-making, and performance on standardized tests. It can even slow the progress of dementia.
- Students who learn another language can better tolerate ambiguity, as well as understand perspectives and cultures different from their own.

ACTA’s report, *Ivory Tower of Babel: Rebuilding Language Learning in Higher Education for a More Secure and Competitive America*, shows that language education at colleges and universities is in jeopardy.

- Language program enrollments have declined 59% from 1965 to 2016 and dropped by 17% from 2016 to 2021 alone.
- In 2011, the federal government cut 40% of the Department of Education’s international programs and language studies budgets, and the situation is much worse as of 2025.
- Language departments are usually the first to be cut when a college faces financial trouble.

In 2024, six out of seven Ohio schools making academic cuts downsized or eliminated their language programs. West Virginia University eliminated all world language majors and graduate programs in 2023.

- Only 11% of colleges and universities require foreign language study at an intermediate or higher level, the minimum needed for meaningful communication.

America’s colleges and universities must continue to provide the many benefits of foreign language instruction to their students.

University leaders can offer robust language instruction while reducing costs by:

- Requiring at least intermediate-level language instruction in general education programs. ACTA’s research shows that schools with intermediate-level requirements have the highest percentage of undergraduates enrolled in language courses at all levels (22%), followed by those with elementary-level requirements (12%), and those with no requirement (9%).
- Narrowing the number of course options in general education curricula instead of eliminating core liberal arts programs. Intermediate language

