

Another challenge is integration. As we encounter new audiences, as we understand the context in which our languages are needed and used, I believe we should see language proficiency as part of a larger and evolving framework that encompasses global competence for our graduates. Language is not merely oral or written expression, but access to other ways of thinking and viewing our world, to different social and historic contexts and traditions that open windows on other cultures and allow the language learner to live, work, or study in diverse fields and a variety of places.

Finally, we must become advocates for all languages. As a response to new national and international needs, languages may be called to take center stage more and more often. The voice of the language community needs to be heard forcefully articulating a clear and uncompromising message: language is a fundamental, integral part of education—early education, secondary education, and higher education. It is a fundamental subject like math or science; it is a fundamental skill like writing.

This strong yet simple message does not favor Spanish or French, Japanese or Korean, but advocates generally for language teaching. Yes, there is some risk that if you offer Chinese, Japanese, and Italian, then Spanish and French enrollments (French in particular) may drop. But the broader picture requires that we work together with the various constituencies concerned, with secondary-school teachers and with our colleagues at the university. We need to find the courage to sit down together for the greater good and articulate a message that is in tune with the new individual, national, and international needs in the professional schools and across the academy. I am not suggesting you discard your scholarship, but expand it. Ultimately, we—the languages—will be stronger for it.

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