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Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia of the Committee on Homeland Security and
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*Lost in Translation: A Review of the Federal Government's Efforts to Develop a
Foreign Language Strategy.*

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Introduction

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, distinguished members of the subcommittee and guests. I want to thank you for holding this hearing dealing with the federal government's efforts to develop our national capacity in foreign languages. I am particularly pleased to be able to discuss these issues in a national context but also to provide concrete examples of positive and productive outcomes of current federal and state legislation, particularly at Ohio State University, a university with a strong commitment to internationalizing its curriculum and showcasing foreign languages. I am testifying in my capacity as Director of OSU's Foreign Language Center and Chair of the Department of French and Italian and bring with me over 40 years of experience in the field of foreign languages as a teacher and as an administrator. I am past president of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and have been principal (or co-principal) investigator of multiple federal and state grants.

The title of this panel, *Lost in Translation*, is a particularly apt and rich concept and is well suited for deliberations of this sort. It refers to an excellent article by Katherine McIntire Peters, which appeared in the Government Executive Magazine (check source) in 2002. The author points first to the experience of Robert Baer who was unable to find speakers of Pashto and Dari who could collect information from the many refugees that were pouring into Tajikistan from Afghanistan and then describes the difficulties that many federal agencies have in recruiting qualified speakers of other languages. However, *lost in translation* provides other insights into discussions of the need to build our national capacity in foreign languages. It can refer to the mistranslations of words and concepts on road and street signs that amuse us, but which when applied at the diplomatic level become much more serious in nature. As noted on the University of Michigan's foreign language website, "Those who have mastered the nuances of a second language are keenly aware how much gets "lost in translation" and that what is lost is often the most crucial point." The purpose of my comments is to bring the perspective of higher education to today's discussion and to join with you in ensuring that our collective message does not get lost in translation.

We are fortunate at this point in time to be able to state with some certainty that there is widespread acceptance of the value of foreign languages; such support manifests itself in common understandings such as the following: 1) Our nation's security, political, and economic interests are well served by a nation equipped with foreign language skills; 2) Foreign language skills are useful in the international arena but also domestically and go far in promoting intercultural understanding; 3) We need a federal and private workforce prepared for and ready to compete in the

global marketplace; proficiency in a foreign language or languages needs to be an essential component of the professional toolkit of our undergraduates; 4) The federal government is promoting foreign language study through the work of subcommittees such as this one, through many new and long-standing federal grant opportunities, and through small but growing incentives for federal employees with foreign language skills; such advocacy is essential in promoting language study; 5) Our discourse about foreign languages has moved beyond discussions of the basic skills acquired through a foreign language requirement to conversations about the need for longer foreign language sequences in order to develop individuals with advanced language skills, a process that requires long-term commitments on the part of the student and long-term financial commitments by national, state, and local authorities; and 6) Few would disagree that the immersion experiences provided through study abroad and the experience of “living and working” in another language and culture are essential to improving our national language capacity.

Changes in language teaching and learning

Over the past several decades, we have seen dramatic changes in the ways in which foreign languages are learned and taught. These changes are reflected in our national discourse about language learning, in our discussions of establishing local, state and national foreign language policies, in the production of classroom textbooks, print, and multimedia materials, and in day-to-day teaching and learning strategies in the classroom. Many examples illustrate this point. For instance, classrooms once characterized by grammar translation some years ago and in the 60s by dialogue memorization have been replaced with practical, performance-based curricula. Today's foreign language programs and courses are characterized in terms of proficiency outcomes; curriculum development can be informed by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (<http://www.actfl.org>) and the 5 Cs embedded in them (Communication, Culture, Comparisons, Communities and Connections) as well as current research on how languages are used in other cultures and countries.

New curricular initiatives

A recent article in *Inside Higher Education* (<http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/01/02/languages>) entitled “Dramatic Plan for Language Programs” also reflects the changes taking place in foreign language study, in this case indicating a movement away from a primary literary emphasis in undergraduate major and minor programs to an approach that includes areas such as history, culture, economics, and mass media. The article describes the report of a panel convened by the Modern Language Association, a report that is still being reviewed by the organization but which was discussed in a briefing at this year's MLA meeting in Philadelphia. Although the reforms grew out of educational concerns, some panel members felt that the new emphases would produce graduates whose expertise would be more useful to the government, business, and education than those of current graduates. The MLA panel mentions two exemplary programs: Georgetown University's German program (<http://www3.georgetown.edu/departments/german/programs/curriculum/>), which focuses on multiple literacies and New York University's Latin American Studies program (<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/latin/>).

Interestingly, although such a report is welcomed and indicative of substantial change, many postsecondary institutions, whether two-year or four-year, have

already established majors or tracks that emphasize a more cultural approach to language study. For example, many programs offer students a series of undergraduate options. Students in the French program at OSU can choose among the following tracks: French language and culture, French language and literature, French for the professions, and a more general French Studies Track. Students who minor in French also have options (film/culture, language, literature, business, and French studies). These tracks are popular with students who take seriously the option of tailoring their major and minor to their personal and professional goals.

Many programs offer business or professional courses or tracks for students. Others offer business internship programs that combine discipline-specific work and foreign languages. The long-standing International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island (<http://www.uri.edu/iep/>) is an excellent example of this type of cooperative venture. Originally offered in German, the program has now expanded to include French and Spanish (and will soon add Chinese) and offers students the opportunity to obtain two degrees, become fluent in a language, and participate in an internship abroad with one of the program's corporate partners. Georgia Tech provides other examples of innovative undergraduate degrees. Their Bachelor of Science degree in Global Economics & Modern Languages (<http://www.iac.gatech.edu/degrees/iaml.htm>) combines rigorous training in economics with extensive foreign language study. The separate language concentrations include Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish. A B.S. in International Affairs and Modern Languages is also available (<http://www.iac.gatech.edu/degrees/iaml.htm/>).

These are but a few of the examples that illustrate innovative undergraduate programs designed to prepare students in a discipline but also to provide high levels of language proficiency that would allow the individual to interact socially and professionally in his or her second language. Such programs prepare graduates for the types of jobs available in both the public and private sector.

Advanced skills and media

In today's world, advanced skills, formerly introduced to students primarily through the literature of a culture, take on new meanings in light of the accessibility of information and new technologies. Nations and societies are able to present themselves and their stories instantly to a worldwide audience in print, audio, and visual media. These stories are always conveyed by the different media that are characteristic of each society—whether print, television, newspaper, Internet, or community gossip. Technology today allows us almost instant access—both real and virtual—to these formerly inaccessible media through satellite broadcasting, the Internet, and through hand-held technologies such as the iPod and cell phones, which are becoming increasingly versatile and multimedia-ready (a prime example is Apple's new Iphone). The challenge for us is to know how to use that access intelligently and to integrate modern media into the instruction and learning of foreign languages and cultures. It is becoming increasingly clear that advanced language skills are to a large extent dependent upon the ability to access the media of another culture and to interpret, evaluate, and use the information gained to achieve one's goals—whether interpersonal or professional. Thus, initiatives such as OSU's World Media and Culture Center (<http://wmcc.osu.edu>) puts access to the media of the world at the core of the language curriculum. The media-rich curriculum of OSU's Chinese Flagship program (<http://www.chineseflagship.org/>) adds to the current FSI/ILR and ACTFL metrics definition of advanced skills; it

includes the ability to participate in the major media of China (e.g., interpreting oral and written media, discussing them in culturally appropriate ways, and creating presentations in these media for target-culture presentations). The OSU Chinese Flagship Program has also developed an electronic portfolio system that incorporates the students' interaction with various Chinese media into a transparent assessment tool. Such a system requires the program to elicit language performances from its students and presents them to a variety of interested observers.

Positive effects of federally funded programs

The language community applauds the federal government's continued funding of long-standing programs (Title VI funding, Fulbright Study Abroad programs) and of newer initiatives (National Security Language Initiative, National Flagship Programs), all of which when viewed together comprise an integrated approach to developing our nation's capacity in foreign languages and have greatly benefited recipients of this funding, whether institutional or individual. In his 2005 testimony to the Committee on House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Select Education chaired by Representative Pat Tiberi, Jerry Ladman, at that time Associate Provost, International Affairs at OSU outlined the significant benefits accrued through the various Title VI-funded Area Studies Centers and the National East Asian Languages Resource Center; he described how this funding was used to leverage internal support of language and culture studies and curricula at OSU, to increase interdisciplinary research both within and across regions, to strengthen library holdings, and to increase P-12 outreach efforts. Title VI funding of the OSU National Language Resource Center and the National East Asian Languages Resource Center was instrumental in the development, conceptualization and funding of the OSU's leading-edge World Media and Culture Center referred to earlier in this testimony.

OSU has benefited significantly from the federal funding provided through the National Security Education Program which sponsors our Chinese Flagship Program and its P-12 Chinese Pipeline Project. In addition, this funding has been leveraged to attract two major projects funded by the State of Ohio (former Governor Robert Taft's Core Curriculum for the State of Ohio) for an alternative licensure program for teachers of Chinese and Japanese and for a Board of Regents' Chinese Summer Academy. The OSU Chinese Flagship Program has also entered into cooperation with the Ohio Department of Education to build the infrastructure for mainstreaming Chinese language instruction in schools throughout Ohio. and is working with that office to develop P-12 curriculum in Chinese as part of a Foreign Language Assistance Program grant awarded to ODE for the development of a P-6 Chinese curriculum.

The undergraduate and graduate fellowships provided through the National Security Education program have been instrumental in providing longer-term study abroad opportunities for our graduate and undergraduate students in countries where critical languages are spoken, and through longer-term study abroad opportunities, students indeed have the opportunity to develop advanced-level skills in these languages.

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education organized in the early 90s a competition to fund collaborations between high school and universities in the area of foreign languages. OSU received one of these grants and through it established the Collaborative Articulation and Assessment Project (<http://caap.osu.edu>). This partnership between higher education and Ohio public schools was designed to improve the articulation between high school and college

language study. I mention this project here not only because of the importance of such collaborative efforts but also to demonstrate the longevity of many programs originally seeded by a federal grant. CAAP, now funded by OSU and the Ohio Board of Regents, continues to grow and to be instrumental in helping smooth the transition between levels.

Another federally funded initiative needs to be mentioned at this point. The Partnership for Public Service (<http://www.ourpublicservice.org/>), which as the members of this committee know, was designed to serve as an interface between federal employers and the academic community. An excellent example of collaborative efforts of a non-profit organization, the federal government, and the academic community, the Partnership has as its stated purpose “to make the government an employer of choice for talented, dedicated Americans through educational outreach, research, legislative advocacy, and hands-on partnerships with agencies on workforce management issues”. Although its mission is larger than foreign languages, OSU served as one of the Partnership’s pilot schools and was able to include foreign languages as one of OSU’s emphases. Because of its collaborative relationship with the Partnership, the OSU Foreign Language Center has been able to establish connections with many federal agencies that seek employees with language skills and bring these opportunities to our students’ attention. This initiative has greatly enhanced our capacity to make career connections for our students in languages and to contribute to a language-ready federal work force. Because of our connections with the Partnership, we hosted a highly successful Foreign Language Career Day in the spring of 2006 attended by over 200 students and representatives from ten federal agencies.

These are but a few examples of how federal funding has made significant contributions to our language and culture missions at OSU and I am sure that other colleges and universities could tell similar success stories to further emphasize the important role that federal funding plays in building and sustaining foreign language initiatives. As was noted earlier, federal support is but one component of the funding of foreign language and culture study; it is, however, instrumental in leveraging monies from internal sources, from state sources of funding, and from private foundations.

Foreign Languages at the Core: A Meat and Potatoes Approach

Many voices at the national level are calling for increased foreign language study, increased internationalization of the curriculum, and expansion of the foreign language pipeline in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools. Clearly, the federal government has been instrumental in changing the discourse regarding foreign languages through its expansion of federal funding for foreign languages and through the attention brought to the need for foreign language study by House and Senate committees tasked with working with the academic, business, and public sectors on foreign language issues.

Other voices are weighing in on the need for foreign languages. For example, the report of the Committee on Economic Development (www.ced.org), represented at today’s hearing and warmly welcomed by the foreign language community, called for expanding international content and for expanding the foreign language training pipeline to increase the number of speakers of other languages, especially the critical languages. The American Council on Education (<http://www.acenet.edu>) called on colleges and universities “to make foreign language competence an integral part of

a college education” and to ensure that “every baccalaureate holder...be competent in a second language.” In a similar vein, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (www.aacu.org/) characterized the ability to communicate in another language as “one of the fundamental skills that define “empowered learners.” The report of National Association of State Boards of Education report entitled “The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring a place for the arts and foreign languages in America’s schools” (<http://www.nasbe.org/>) and Global Competence & National Needs, report of the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (www.lincolncommission.org) provide additional support for language study and in the case of the latter study abroad. These are but a sampling of current reports from national organizations and commissions pointing to the value of language study.

At the state and local levels, conversations about the value of foreign languages are becoming more prevalent. A *Columbus Dispatch* editorial (January 15, 2006) stated that “The old arguments in favor of learning foreign languages are still valid. It’s an excellent intellectual exercise, in many cases enhances the learner’s appreciation of the grammar and structure of his own native language, and helps the learner understand more about the world.” But it is the Dispatch’s take on the “new argument” for foreign languages that captures one’s interest: “The new argument—that once obscure nations and cultures can affect the lives of Americans dramatically, so Americans need to understand them better—is even more compelling.” Robert Taft, former governor of Ohio, called for a bold plan to increase high school graduation requirements; in addition to increases in math and science requirements, two years of foreign language were to be added. In lieu of a yes or no on the foreign language component of the bill, the legislature asked for the creation of the Foreign Language Advisory Council in Ohio SB 311 to devise an implementation plan for K-12 language instruction.

Even with positive attitudes toward foreign language study increasingly articulated in public forums, languages are still not considered a staple in the US curriculum. The reasons vary but are illustrated by comments such as the following: A superintendent of a Midwestern school district was quoted as saying that he would rather see federal funds go to meat-and-potatoes subjects. Another was concerned that there was not enough room for foreign languages in the curriculum. Still others at the university level worry that students from the sciences, engineering, and business must meet increasingly large numbers of requirements imposed by their professional organizations, thus those making curricular decisions continue to assert that there is not enough time for foreign languages in the curriculum.

Despite the clear and strong support from the federal government and from various educational organizations, the foreign language community and its advocates have an important task ahead of them, one recognized by the Committee for Economic Development, which suggested a public relations campaign. That task is to lobby to have foreign languages included in the core curriculum and to make the case that languages are an essential part of the basic skills set needed by a graduate (high school or college) who wants to compete in the global economy. Foreign languages need to be universally seen as meat and potatoes, an integrated part of the core curriculum, not just a tasty dessert.

Conclusion

Higher education has already begun to respond to the task of preparing a global ready language citizen equipped with language and culture skills and much progress has been made in the last several decades. This progress is in part due to initiatives sponsored by the federal government and in part due to state- and university-specific initiatives to advance the cause of foreign languages such as those described in this testimony. With new curricula, state and federal support, the advocacy of the major organizations such as the Committee for Economic Development, the foreign language and international education community acknowledges that much work needs to be done to create a language-ready workforce for the future. We are ready to work with public and private entities to increase our capacity in languages and to encourage advanced language skill development. I would suggest the following as areas that need attention:

- Continued emphasis on the development of K-16 partnerships (e.g., Flagship K-16 pipeline and federal and state funding for such initiatives, perhaps a revival of the FIPSE-sponsored foreign language articulation grants);
- Continued funding of longer language sequences which will lead to the development of advanced language skills through the National Flagship program which focuses on level 3 skills as defined by the FSI and the creation of other initiatives that support longer sequences in both commonly and less commonly taught languages;
- Continued funding of programs that develop a core of qualified language teachers (particularly in the critical languages where a teacher infrastructure needs to be established) so that teachers will be available to staff longer sequences of language instruction as they are implemented;
- The development of exchange programs with other countries where their young people can live and study in our country and our youth can live and study in their countries for long enough periods of time to develop solid language skills.
- Recognition that a strong language infrastructure for all language programs not just the critical languages is essential for language learning in the US.
- Continued advocacy for foreign languages by the federal and state governments, educational and business organizations to make foreign languages part of the core curriculum and one of our basic educational skills;
- A recognition that an international curriculum must include a substantial foreign language component;
- Development of a national language policy and the establishment of language policies at the state level as well; and
- Continued encouragement and federal support for study abroad programs where language and culture skills are integral to the program.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify and to share these views with you and the subcommittee.

