

THE VIRGINIA REPORT ON THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DISCIPLINE

AT THE end of 1984, the Council of Higher Education of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the coordinating body for the state's colleges and universities, decided to launch a high-level, comprehensive study of the status of the foreign language discipline in Virginia. The study would cover the status of the discipline in all twenty-three community colleges as well as in all the state-supported senior universities and colleges.¹ Similar reports had recently been issued and distributed on the fields of computer science, teacher preparation, and developmental English. But this was to be the first time Virginia would systematically evaluate the state of the art in a major discipline in the arts and sciences. The earlier reports had received wide attention both within the state and nationally. One of them, on the computer sciences, played a significant role in persuading the Virginia legislature to help fund the purchase of the essential hardware for college-level computer instruction, and it was felt that a meaningful report on the foreign languages might create similar reverberations in funding and above all in heightening public awareness.

Accordingly, the Virginia Task Force on Foreign Languages, a high-level fourteen-member commission of educators and corporate leaders, was carefully selected by the council to prepare the report.² Eighteen months later, the task force presented an approximately three-hundred-page document. The report received widespread local and national public attention. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, probably the state's most influential daily, published an editorial on 13 May 1985, concluding as follows:

Virginia's students may never meet ET, but with the world more and more becoming a global village, the chances are that they will have to deal, either cooperatively or competitively, with people who speak different languages and are from diverse cultures. If the schools and colleges don't prepare them for these close encounters, they will be so tongue-tied they might as well be trying to sell a Model-T to a Martian.

The report, entitled *An Assessment of the Foreign Language Discipline in Virginia's State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education*, analyzes the state of language teaching in the senior public institutions and the two-year institutions. It identifies issues facing the profession and concludes with specific recommendations. A strong case is made for the foreign language discipline as a major and even central component of a liberal arts education, as a culturally broadening experience for inhabitants of the world during the 1980s

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and 1990s, and as a useful tool for persons who will be involved in interculturally and internationally oriented professions in business, trade, commerce, government, tourism, and communications. The task force's findings reveal that, although Virginia's universities and colleges have all made eloquent statements about the importance and usefulness of foreign language study, many of them either are lax in enforcing requirements and standards or else have permitted them to disintegrate in the wake of student and faculty pressures during the seventies. Virginia's institutions have treated languages with uneven, inconsistent attention. A few have enforced rigorous entrance and exit requirements. Many have been negligent or downright permissive. Pockets of strength in language teaching exist here and there alongside areas of incredible weakness.

The task force has proposed a systematic and coherent plan of action embodied in fifty-six recommendations involving the whole spectrum of higher education as well as specific institutions. A lengthy appendix contains institution-specific analyses and recommendations. Each institution is studied from the point of view of requirements for admission, graduation, and placement and proficiency testing; curricula for majors, minors, and graduate study; accelerated foreign languages courses; interdisciplinary programs; the classical languages and the less commonly taught languages; class size; instructional support; foreign study and exchange programs; the qualifications of and support for the foreign language faculty; the use of part-time faculty and of graduate teaching assistants; the need for language methodologists; faculty work load and salaries; faculty development; systemwide coordination in the community colleges; the need for centers of foreign language excellence; and articulation between the postsecondary institutions and the presecondary schools and businesses and industries.

On 5 June 1985 the board of the state council adopted the systemwide recommendations and suggested that in-

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stitutions consider implementing them during the next three years. The board even went one step further than the task force had dared to go. While the task force had urged that foreign language study be required for graduation in BA or BS programs only, the board felt it was time to recommend a language requirement for graduation in *all* bachelor's programs, including those in business, engineering, fine arts, music, and education. On the other hand, whereas the task force report calls for three years of one language or two years each of two languages as a minimum requirement for entrance, the state council board has modified this proposal to enable those colleges with open admissions (mainly the community colleges and a few of the senior universities) to admit persons who could not meet the requirement. Such persons would, however, be expected to study

a foreign language as a precondition for graduation in a bachelor's program.

In all, the Virginia report may well be the first study of this scope ever undertaken by a single state. Its repercussions are expected to be felt for many years to come, and, as it is implemented, the report cannot fail to revitalize foreign language programs throughout the state. It is hoped that the Virginia report will become a model for many other states and, as such, have historic implications for American higher education.

The report contains an executive summary (three pages), five chapters, four appendixes, and the minutes of action by the board of the Council of Higher Education for Virginia at its meeting of 5 June 1985. Reproduced below is chapter 5, the summary chapter of the report.

Virginia Report Chapter 5

For nearly two decades the foreign language discipline has experienced a significant decline in many parts of the nation. This has been at a time, ironically, when the United States has assumed an increasingly active role in world affairs and multinational entities. Virginia's record in the foreign language discipline has been better than average. During the 1960's and 1970's, most states' secondary school enrollments in foreign languages have been severely eroded. Virginia enrollments in the classical and modern languages, however, have remained generally stable. Moreover, in contrast with the wholesale abandonment of language requirements in colleges and universities throughout the nation, a portion of Virginia's post-secondary institutions have retained foreign language study as a precondition for admission and graduation in some degree programs.

Fortunately, the downward spiral appears to have halted nationally, and in many states the interest in foreign language study has begun to increase significantly. The Task Force believes that the time has come for the foreign language discipline in the Commonwealth to undergo complete revitalization. Virginia's institutions of higher education must prepare their graduates both to function effectively as liberally educated citizens of a free society and to work in a rapidly shrinking international environment. The Task Force therefore calls upon Virginia's institutions to place themselves at the cutting edge of American higher education by reemphasizing the importance of the foreign language discipline.

To this end, the Task Force has made a number of recommendations. One group of recommendations, presented in Chapter 4, addresses issues in the discipline that affect the entire system of public higher education in the Commonwealth. Another group of recommendations, found in Appendix I, is addressed to the individual public institutions. After considerable discussion and reflection, the Task Force has selected a limited number of recommendations that merit special emphasis. If these recommendations are adopted and implemented, there is no doubt that the foreign language discipline will undergo substantial revitalization in Virginia.

Virginia has been among the leading states in terms of percentage of high school students enrolled in foreign language courses, and the study of foreign languages at the secondary

level will be encouraged further by the requirements of the new Advanced Studies Diploma curriculum. In order to take advantage of this movement and to ease the pressure upon Virginia's institutions of higher education to offer introductory language courses that more properly belong at the secondary level, the Task Force recommends that

Each senior institution, as soon as possible and by no later than Fall 1988, require that all matriculating students have completed at the secondary level either two years of each of two foreign languages or (preferably) three years of one foreign language.

The study of foreign languages is a central component of liberal education. It is also increasingly useful and necessary in the preparation for professional and business careers in an international society. The Task Force therefore recommends that

Each senior institution as soon as possible require a minimum of two years of study, or its equivalent, in one foreign language for all baccalaureate programs leading to the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree.

Each senior institution encourage students enrolled in all other baccalaureate programs to complete at least one (and preferably two) years of study of a foreign language.

Each two-year institution as soon as possible require a minimum of two years of study, or its equivalent, in one foreign language for all college-transfer degree programs.

Even though an increasing percentage of matriculating students will have studied one or more foreign languages at the secondary level, some of them will choose to begin the study of a new language in college. Because introductory-level foreign language courses are designed to provide a secure foundation in the aural/oral skills, the Task Force recommends that

All introductory-level foreign language courses consist, at a minimum, of four class contact hours per week plus one hour per week of language laboratory or small-group oral drill.

One important result of the study of foreign languages is the development of a multi-cultural perspective and an "interna-

tional literacy." Moreover, the interaction of the foreign languages with other disciplines strengthens the international and cross-cultural perspective of the entire curriculum. The Task Force therefore recommends that

Each institution, to the maximum extent possible, incorporate into its lower-level foreign language curriculum a multi-cultural and international perspective.

Each institution encourage all disciplines and departments to ensure that multi-cultural and international perspectives are incorporated in their curricula through the establishment of appropriate liaisons with the foreign language department.

The Classical languages traditionally have been both the means of transmitting the humanistic concepts of Western civilization and an important contributor to the liberal arts disciplines. There is renewed interest in the study of Latin at the secondary level, and this has led to a critical shortage of qualified Latin teachers in Virginia's high schools. The Task Force recommends that

The senior institutions, when resources and anticipated enrollments permit, develop a major program in Classical Studies, whether leading to a baccalaureate degree in Classical Languages or in Interdisciplinary Studies, whose curriculum meets the requirements for teacher certification.

The advent of the global society and the movement of American business into international markets, especially in the Pacific Basin, have highlighted the need for more instruction in the less-commonly taught languages. Many of Virginia's public institutions now offer lower-level courses in these languages, and the Task Force recommends that

The institutions, to the extent enrollment demand and resources permit, expand their lower-level course offerings in the less-commonly taught languages to full baccalaureate programs.

The preparation of well-qualified language teachers for the secondary schools becomes even more important as foreign language study in Virginia's high schools increases. The Task Force believes that a special program should be established, which combines advanced training in the target language with study in the target country, and therefore recommends that

Planning begin immediately for the establishment of a center for the preparation of secondary school teachers of foreign language whose training incorporates both language instruction at the graduate level and one year of study in the target country.

The continued improvement and vitality of the foreign language discipline requires that Virginia's teachers of foreign languages, whether in the institutions of higher education or at the secondary level, maintain their teaching skills at a high level of professional development. In order to provide a focus for this activity, as well as to serve as a means of disseminating information on new developments in instructional technology, the Task Force recommends that

One or more Center(s) for Excellence in Foreign Language Instruction be established.

The Virginia Community College System develop and promulgate a plan for the revitalization of foreign language education, and establish a position in the central office to

coordinate and assist the development of the foreign language discipline throughout the system.

In the past, several degree programs in specific foreign languages have been terminated by the Council of Higher Education because they failed to meet minimum standards for degree productivity or upper-level enrollments. The principal result of these actions has been to reduce the opportunities for preparing certified language teachers for the secondary schools. The Task Force therefore recommends that

The Council of Higher Education, when reviewing the productivity of a foreign language degree program, take into account the effect of terminating the program upon the production of certified language teachers for Virginia's secondary schools.

It is obvious from these recommendations that in the immediate future the Commonwealth will need to increase its support for the foreign language discipline and, indeed, the liberal arts in general. These recommendations understandably have cost implications: additional faculty positions to accommodate the anticipated student enrollments, more realistic levels of support for faculty professional development, improved instructional support including language laboratories and computer-assisted instruction. Nevertheless, even in times of limited resources, Virginia has always maintained a steady level of commitment to its educational institutions, and the Task Force believes that what it recommends is both realistic and necessary. The quality of higher education in the liberal arts is at stake.

It is apparent that not all of the institutions can adopt all of the recommendations as an integral group. Some may not have the resources to adopt more than a small number of them. The appropriate administrators at each institution and in the central administration of the Virginia Community College System will need to examine carefully the recommendations contained in this report and make the requisite choices consistent with their educational goals and institutional resources. They will need to establish schedules and strategies for implementation that vary from campus to campus. Despite these constraints, the Task Force believes that the institutions must respond to the steadily increasing national—and indeed statewide—demand that the foreign language discipline be strengthened. Surely the national interest requires that this demand be taken seriously.

Nor is the Task Force making a plea only on behalf of general education or the liberal arts. While recognizing the central importance of foreign languages as part of general education, the Task Force stresses that the study of this discipline is essential for many of the professions in a world that grows smaller and smaller. The rise of global interdependency, intercultural and international communications, and trans-national business and industry cannot be ignored. Graduates of Virginia's public institutions of higher education face a highly competitive world. They must be provided with an education that will arm them for this kind of world. As Secretary of Education William J. Bennett has stated,

Do not fear the world too much. Take time to make mankind your business: read literature, study history, know philosophy, learn languages. You will find that the humanities and other liberal arts will help you succeed, and profit, in any career or endeavor.

¹The public institutions of higher education in Virginia include Christopher Newport Coll., Clinch Valley Coll., George Mason Univ., James Madison Univ., Longwood Coll., Mary Washington Coll., Norfolk State Univ., Old Dominion Univ., Radford Univ., Univ. of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth Univ., Virginia Military Inst., Virginia Polytechnic Inst. and State Univ., Virginia State Univ., Coll. of William and Mary, and the twenty-three two-year community colleges of the Virginia Community College System as well as the two-year Richard Bland Coll.

²Members of the Virginia Task Force on Foreign Languages were Douglas W. Alden, French (emeritus), Univ. of Virginia; Jane N. Cox, Supervisor, Foreign Languages, Henrico County Public Schools; Herman K. Doswald, Assoc. Dean, Coll. of Arts and Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Inst. and State Univ.; James J. Fletcher, Asst. Vice-Pres. for Academic Affairs, George Mason Univ.; William S. Gray, Counsel, Industrial Electronics Business Group, General Electric Co.; Jack Kolbert (cochair), Chair, Humanities and Social Sciences, Piedmont Virginia Comm. Coll.; Robert Lisle, Classics, James Madison Univ.;

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NEH Institute—The Romans: Their Language, Their Lives

The National Endowment for the Humanities has recently funded a national institute, cosponsored by the University of Georgia and the American Classical League and designed to strengthen Latin instruction in America's secondary schools and to help relieve the shortage of certified Latin teachers. The institute consists of two intensive five-week summer sessions, to be held on the University of Georgia campus during the summers of 1986 and 1987, with a variety of continuation and follow-up activities scheduled for the 1986-87 and 1987-88 academic years. Participants will receive instruction in the language and in aspects of the civilization, history, and literature of the Romans, centering on the theme "From Republic to Empire."

Eligible to apply are current teachers of Latin or prospective teachers who have a firm, preferably contractual, commitment to teach Latin beginning in 1986 or 1987 and who have some background in Latin but

lack certification in the subject. Participants successfully completing the work required in the institute will receive thirty-five quarter hours of nonresident credit from the University of Georgia.

Institute participants will receive the following support: full waiver of tuition; all textbooks; room, board, and a \$200 weekly stipend during each of the two five-week summer sessions; transportation costs averaging \$310 for each summer session and for the two-day mid-year (February 1987) and postinstitute (December 1987) conferences. The participant's home school or school district is required to provide \$200 toward the costs of each summer session as well as released time for attendance at the midyear and postinstitute conferences.

Persons desiring further information or application materials should write to the project director, Richard A. LaFleur, Classics Dept., Univ. of Georgia, Athens 30602, or call LaFleur or the project administrative assistant, Mary Wells Ricks, between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at (404) 542-1261. Deadline for receipt of completed applications is 1 April 1986.