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Then and Now

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THE ASSOCIATION of Departments of Foreign Languages was established through the conviction of a number of chairpersons in foreign languages that the only way to meet challenge and crisis was with leadership, open communication, and unity among those in the profession. In December 1968, at the MLA Annual Convention, a group of over four hundred foreign language department chairpersons held a special meeting to discuss common problems and to consider the advisability of founding an association of departments of foreign languages. A few months later, after considering the strong positive response to this proposal, the MLA Executive Council voted to sponsor the creation of ADFL and authorized funds for this purpose. It also appointed an organizing committee, which drafted a constitution and established procedures for creating a permanent ADFL Executive Committee. The organizing group identified some of the issues and problems that most urgently required the attention of the association, such as the training and supervision of graduate teaching assistants, articulation between two-year and four-year colleges, the foreign language requirement, and undergraduate curriculum reform. The first issue of the *ADFL Bulletin* was published in September 1969, inviting membership in the association and setting forth details of the association's purpose, membership, organization, plans, and projects.

Since its inception, ADFL has worked to provide initiative and educational leadership and to meet the various challenges in foreign language education and the profession in productive ways. ADFL membership is departmental; members are foreign language chairpersons in colleges and universities of all sizes and types. The role of the ADFL Executive Committee is to determine policy and procedures for the organization and to advise the director on ADFL projects. The committee is composed of nine chairpersons serving three-year terms on a rotating basis, representing PhD- and BA/MA-granting departments and two-year college programs.

Among notable ADFL projects are the publication of the *ADFL Bulletin*, two annual summer seminars for chairpersons, ADFL-sponsored sessions at the MLA convention and other meetings, surveys of various types, and, recently, the development of policy statements on issues such as class size, junior-faculty

development, and evaluation of nontraditional fields. The *ADFL Bulletin*, which is published three times a year, prints essays dealing with professional, pedagogical, curricular, and departmental matters. During the last score of years, ADFL has actively participated in discussions of issues of concern to those teaching and promoting foreign languages and literatures in the United States, and the *ADFL Bulletin* has recorded this participation.

Since 1969, ADFL has attempted to monitor and, when appropriate, influence changes in foreign language education and the profession. As we examine the past and look to the future, it is fitting that we focus on the changing nature of foreign language education and related issues. From the perspectives of the profession and the public, the years 1968 and 1988 may be said to exemplify bad times and good times for foreign languages in the United States. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of uncertainty for the language profession. Enrollments were declining, foreign language requirements were being dropped by a large number of colleges and universities, and job prospects for teachers of foreign languages were grim. Today, by contrast, there is evidence of renewed interest in foreign languages, foreign language education, and international and area studies. Enrollments in foreign languages are rising at all levels, foreign language requirements are being instituted or reinstated, and the job market for PhD candidates seems to be improving.

Excerpts taken from volume 1 of the *ADFL Bulletin* document the educational atmosphere of the time. Such a historical perspective can be both revealing and rewarding: reexamining the past may serve as a reminder that we are ourselves best qualified to speak for our profession and as a springboard for discussion about what needs to be accomplished. In the first volume as well as in later issues of the *Bulletin* a significant number of pages are devoted to status reports and essays on the foreign language requirement in institutions of higher education. In volume 1, number 2, twenty-four statements relating to the foreign language requirement at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, constitute "Some Propositions concerning Requirements—Language and Other: Statements by Four Language Department Chairmen" (13-16). This article was originally reprinted from the *Foreign Lan-*

guage Courier (42 [1969]), published by the language departments at Ann Arbor and signed by the following chairpersons: Theodore V. Buttrey (Classical Studies), John Mersereau, Jr. (Slavic Languages), James C. O'Neill (Romance Languages), and Clarence K. Pott (Germanic Languages). Five of the twenty-four statements seem to have continuing validity twenty years later:

14. The current requirements of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts reflect the faculty's intent to assure the student's contact with each of five intellectual disciplines: English, foreign language, natural science, social science, the humanities.

15. It was assumed, 15 years ago, that a cultural adjustment to a rapidly-changing world was imperative for educated men, that Americans could no longer afford the luxury of a parochial or monolingual culture, and that the knowledge of foreign languages was the most direct instrument for advancing cultural adjustment and worldwide understanding.

16. The study of a language other than English offers, first, the *experience* of breaking the barrier of a single speech; of grasping, if only imperfectly, the sense of what it means and how it feels to organize one's whole world, from cradle to grave, in a set of symbols which are meaningless to one who knows only English. This experience, which heightens as mastery is approached, is nonetheless valid at levels far short of mastery, and in the study of ancient as well as of modern languages.

17. It is desirable, even necessary, that the maximum number of Americans in these last years of the century have the maximum possible access to the symbols in which the rest of the world expresses itself—that is, to foreign language.

18. This has consequences for the educational system, and lays an obligation upon it. The habit of linguistic and cultural isolationism, self-satisfaction, and false pride which characterizes the American attitude generally has always had to be countered with strong measures. The production of a linguistically sophisticated elite at the end of the educational process probably depends on the exposure of large masses of students to language study somewhere during their educational program. The requirement of such study, either for entrance or for exit, or both, by the collegiate institutions of the country is the king-pin of the whole structure. This may be the only country where this is so, but it is certainly so here.

In "Why a Foreign Language Breadth Requirement" (17-19), Cyril Birch, then professor of Oriental languages and former associate dean of instruction in the College of Letters and Sciences at the University of California, Berkeley, formulated some reasons for studying a foreign language:

What the study of a second language offers is an understanding of the nature of language as such, a sensitivity to language, to its power and its limitations. There are things about English that one cannot learn in English. Not even

the techniques of linguistics—as long as the linguist himself uses English—can force the bars of the prison in which our native language traps our thought. A language has its genius, the cultural genius of its community. It has its untranslatable concepts: *ennui*, or *Gemütlichkeit*, or the phenomenon we translate from Chinese as "face" but which becomes more comprehensible only when we collect all the Chinese phrases that relate to "losing face," "wanting face," "giving face." A simple phrase in another language can detonate the imagination as no translation can. . . . The problem of language work in college is the problem of the actual nature of the process. Students resent the boring mechanical exercises, the low intellectual level of asking the way to the railroad station. Some of the common complaints probably contain a lot of nonsense. We make a great mistake to think that the development of the mind, even in college, demands a constant flow of great ideas—that Western Civilization is somehow more intellectually respectable than German 1. True, language teachers have a long way to go in improving their methods. . . . But whether listening, speaking, reading or writing, the learner is involved one way or another in the essential process: the painful, time-consuming but ultimately invaluable accumulation of tiny sensibilities from another culture.

One may accept the advantages and be not too unhappy with the process, and still worry that four quarters are not going to equip the student with any useful degree of competence. It would be so good if the second language, the all-important first foreign language, could be thrust back into the high school. In fact this is happening more and more, even though the University entrance requirement is still held down to two years of high school foreign language. But is the fourth quarter level adequate—after all that effort, isn't one still short of the goal? In this connection, the Foreign Service of the U.S. uses an interesting definition of "useful" knowledge of a foreign language: the ability to handle everyday speech, to read a newspaper, and to read and discuss a technical article in one particular field. If the fourth quarter can be viewed as a springboard rather than a terminus, then we can see that no great distance remains before this level of competence can be reached. One of the main aims of the fourth quarter course should be to encourage the student to continue on into the fifth—of his own free will.

Not everyone in the profession agreed on the necessity of a foreign language requirement. Among others, Jeffrey Sammons (then chairperson of the Department of Germanic Languages at Yale University) felt that changes were needed in the foreign language department, changes that would be beneficial in the long run. In his essay "Our Problems Are Our Own" (24-26), he strongly urged the profession not to take a stand against the revision of foreign language requirements, explaining that attention should be paid instead to curriculum reform and liberalization. And he proposed that the profession be concerned with other issues deserving self-critical attention, such as reform

in the study of literature and in the way culture is taught. He found, too, that the overall quality of language instruction was unsatisfactory, and the training of teachers inadequate. Among possible solutions, he suggested that foreign language teachers be professionalized, that foreign language programs operate "under the direction of competent and willing experts who may be expected to be rewarded on the same basis as their colleagues in other fields." Language pedagogy, he said, "is a legitimate branch of knowledge and . . . it is imperative that those who perform this service be eligible for promotion and tenure." He ends his essay with the following call:

But first of all we must turn to ourselves. It is not fair for us to fight the students, for they are the ones who are obliged to sit in those classrooms. Nor is it dignified for the profession to fight for the maintenance of curriculum requirements that are too often devised not in the interest of the students but as a pact of accommodation among departmental baronies. If we believe that FL can be taught and should be learned, we should try to demonstrate this

by performance rather than by incantation. And if we believe that the learning of FL has fundamental educational value, we should try to set good examples in our own disciplines. Nobody else is likely to give us much help for a while.

In addition to reporting the views of chairpersons, volume 1 of the *ADFL Bulletin* offered its readers the perspectives of, among others, an untenured assistant professor, an editor in an allied discipline, and an undergraduate language major. And in addition to focusing on the burning issue of the time, the foreign language requirement, the *Bulletin* attempted to supply information and insights concerning curricular and programmatic innovations, trends affecting the profession, and educational policies. As in 1969, the *Bulletin* today remains committed to the concepts of openness, breadth of coverage, and freedom from parochialism; as in the past, the association aims to be as responsive as possible to the needs and interests of its members.