



The Commission on Language Learning of the American Academy of Arts: An Update

Dr. Bill Rivers

Executive Director, Joint National Committee for Languages

December 9, 2016

American Academy of Arts and Sciences & Language

- AAAS – founded in 1780 by John Adams and others
- Oldest US Academy, 2nd oldest in the world after the Royal Academy
- 2013: *The Heart of the Matter* – Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences;
 - Requested by Congress in 2012
- 2013 – participant in the *Languages for All* summit
- 2014 – request from Congress to AAAS to assess the impact of language on the national interest
 - First broad based, Congressionally requested study since 1979 (Perkins Commission)
- July 2015 – Commission established
- New commission will work through 2016 to assess the impact of FL on education, global security, economic growth, and social justice
- Then spend a second year proselytizing
- JNCL-NCLIS, ACTFL, CAL, American Councils, CASL, and others have been working on this project for 2 years



Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 21, 2014

Dr. Don M. Randel
Chair of the Board
American Academy of Arts & Sciences
Norton's Woods
136 Irving Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dr. Jonathan Fanton
President
American Academy of Arts & Sciences
Norton's Woods
136 Irving Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Dr. Randel and Dr. Fanton:

We write to request that the American Academy undertake a new study, proceeding from the excellent work presented in *The Heart of the Matter*, to examine the nation's current capacity in languages, and how a greater attention to language training can improve the education of a citizenry prepared to thrive in a multicultural society participating in a global economy and how such preparation influences international cooperation and diplomacy, trade and foreign investment, national security and the ability of all Americans to enjoy a rich and meaningful life.

English is no longer sufficient as a *lingua franca*— neither at home or abroad. The percentage of the world's population that speaks English as a first language is declining rapidly; if current demographic trends continue, only 5% will be native English speakers by 2050. At the same time, the ability to communicate in languages other than English has never been more important, as:

- American jobs and exports are more dependent than ever on foreign markets;
- The American population is increasingly multilingual;
- Americans are more engaged diplomatically and militarily around the globe than ever before; and
- Challenges like poverty and disease, and opportunities in scientific research and technological innovation, all require greater international understanding and cooperation.

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences has the ability to provide critical assistance in this effort by assembling education, business and policy leaders to examine the relationship between language learning and the nation's strength, competitiveness and well-being.

In order to assess the national impact of language learning, we request that the American Academy examine the following questions:

How does language learning influence economic growth, cultural diplomacy, the productivity of future generations, and the fulfillment of all Americans? What actions should the nation take to ensure excellence in all languages as well as international education and research, including how we may more effectively use current resources to advance language attainment?

Your answers to these questions will help Congress, the states and local communities design effective programs to ensure that America remains competitive and strong. We look forward to reviewing the results of your efforts.

Sincerely,



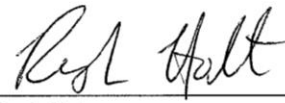
Leonard Lance
Member of Congress



David E. Price
Member of Congress



Don Young
Member of Congress



Rush Holt
Member of Congress

Commission members

- Chair: Dr. Paul LeClerc, former CEO, NYPL and former president, CUNY-Hunter
- Members as of 7/4/16 (* denotes a fellow of AAAS):
 - Dr. Dan Davidson, President, American Councils for International Education
 - Ms. Marty Abbott, Executive Director, ACTFL
 - Dr. Rosemary Feal, Executive Director, MLA
 - Dr. Brian Edwards,* Northwestern University
 - Amb. Karl Eikenberry*, LTG, USA (ret.), Stanford University
 - Dr. Pauline Yu*, President, American Council of Learned Societies
 - Dr. Nicholas Dirks*, Chancellor, University of California (Berkeley)
 - Ms. Jessie Little Doe Baird, Wôpanâak Nation
 - Dr. Mark Aronoff*, SUNY-Stonybrook Dept. of Linguistics
 - Dr. Phil Rubin, Haskins Lab
 - Dr. Ruben Rumbaut, University of California, Irvine
 - Hon. Diane Wood*, Chief Judge, US Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit
 - Dr. Carol Gluck*, Columbia University
 - Ken Wallach, Executive Chairman, Central National Gottesman
 - Dr. Hunter Rawlings*, American Association of Universities
 - Dr. David S. C. Chu, President, Instituted for Defense Analyses
 - Amb. Nancy McEldowney, Foreign Service Institute
 - Dr. Marta Tienda*, Princeton University



Next steps for the Commission

- Public meetings
- Public input: language@amacad.org; 617-576-0002
- Briefing papers:
 - America's Languages: Challenges and Promise: American Councils Research Center
 - The Contribution of Language to the Economic Interests of the US: JNCL
 - Language and Global Security: McGinn Associates
 - Language, Education, and Cognition: Penn State University, Center for Language Science
 - Language Preservation and Language Access: Center for Applied Linguistics
- Report to the Congress, February 28, 2017
- 2017: evangelizing
- <https://www.amacad.org/content/Research/researchproject.aspx?i=21896>



The Case for Languages: The Commission's white papers

- Briefing papers requested by the Commission; aligned with the questions asked by the Congress
- Available on website
- Cover all the bases for language advocacy!
- America's Languages: Challenges and Promise: American Councils Research Center (Richard D. Brecht, lead author)
- The Contribution of Language to the Economic Interests of the US: JNCL (Bill Rivers, lead author)
- Foreign Language, Cultural Diplomacy, and Global Security: McGinn Associates (Gail McGinn, lead author)
- Language and Productivity for All Americans: Penn State University, Center for Language Science (Judy Kroll, lead author)
- Language Preservation and Language Access: Center for Applied Linguistics (Terry Wiley, lead author)



Briefing Paper: *America's Languages: Challenges and Promise*

- Overview paper for the Commission
- Premise: There are a great many reasons to invest in language learning
 - Educational & Cognitive benefits from bilingualism
 - Global security
 - Economic growth
- There are significant challenges:
 - Perceptions among policy makers at all levels that English is enough, that the rest of the world is learning English, that other subjects (e.g., coding) are more important
 - Perceptions among policy makers that language learning is too hard – can't be done
- But there's reason for optimism:
 - Outcomes: where we do language well (e.g., DLIFLC, Dual Language, Flagships) – we do it very well indeed – at the Advanced threshold for HS graduates and Superior and beyond for college graduates
 - Public support – parents want languages for their kids
 - The employment sector wants “linguistic and cultural human capital”



Briefing Paper: *The Contribution of Language to the Economic Interests of the US*

- Language is an important component of the US economy
 - The language industry has annual revenues in the US of at least \$15b
 - The language industry provides work for more than 200,000 Americans, at an annual pay averaging \$80,000
 - The public sector – teaching at all levels, US Government linguists – employs at least another 150,000 Americans
- The Language industry is highly tech-savvy
 - Translation, localization, and globalization depend on technology
 - Language learning makes increasing, innovative use of technology
- The broader employment sector increasingly values “global talent”
 - 11% of US mid- and large-size companies (of which there are 120,000) seek to fill jobs requiring language (Michigan State University Recruiting Trends Survey)
 - 45% of US companies give advantage to candidates with language skills
 - Language and cultural expertise are equated with flexibility, adaptability, prudent risk-taking, and interpersonal skills
 - Global Talent = Language + another skill [teaching, translating, accounting, engineering, etc.)



Briefing Paper: *Foreign Language, Cultural Diplomacy, and Global Security*

- Language is vital to how the US meets its global responsibilities
- The Federal Government faces persistent challenges in building and sustaining the required language capacity
 - Diversity of languages required for Federal Agencies
 - Diversity of agencies & missions
 - Diversity of languages
- Historically, responding only to imminent crises (World War II, Sputnik/Cold War, Iranian Revolution, Gulf War)
- After 9/11, sustained efforts across the US Government:
 - National Security Language Initiative
 - Defense Language Transformation Roadmap
 - National Language Service Corps
 - The Language Flagship
 - StarTALK



Briefing Paper: *Language and Productivity for All Americans*

- Bilingualism confers many cognitive and educational benefits
 - No matter how or when acquired
 - Language *use* is the key factor – the more the better, higher proficiency correlates with larger effects
 - Biliteracy matters, especially for educational effects
- Educational:
 - Children in dual language programs perform better on standardized tests by 5th grade (North Carolina, Portland, SF studies)
 - Bilinguals acquire additional languages much faster – 2x as fast if the languages are related (e.g., French and Spanish); but this holds even for unrelated languages
- Cognitive
 - Infants in bilingual households process information more efficiently
 - Bilingual children have better executive control (attention, planning)
 - Bilingualism in adults correlates with a 5-year delay in the onset of the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease
 - Bilingualism in adults slows other cognitive decay later in life (memory, task switching, attention)



Briefing Paper: *Language and the Fulfillment of the Potential of all Americans*

- 60 million Americans speak a language other than English at home
- We don't have enough programs for heritage language speakers to maintain their home languages
- English Language Learner programs, required by Federal law as a matter of civil rights, are also insufficient for the demand
 - Dual Language has emerged in the past ten years as the most effective ELL program
 - But teacher shortages and funding shortages limit the capacity
- Civil Rights regulations ensure access to social services for those who can't speak English
 - Capacity has not grown as fast as the demand, especially in languages of lesser diffusion
 - Discrimination persists, especially in the workplace



Contact

- Bill Rivers, writers@languagepolicy.org

