

Language Advocacy in the Post-WVU* Era – Challenges and New Directions: Perspectives From French¹

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Abstract—In an interconnected and multilingual world, language and cultural knowledge are essential global skills, as they are locally in an increasingly multilingual United States. Within the context of declining enrollments in languages in US colleges and universities and elimination of foreign language majors at WVU, language advocacy is more important than ever. This article examines the rationale, importance, theory and best practices of language advocacy, with an overview of advocacy challenges and of strategies for success. Examples from three higher education institutions provide inspiration and pathways to effective advocacy that can be applied in a variety of institutional environments.

Index Terms—multilingualism, languages, advocacy, French, Francophone

I. INTRODUCTION

Following a period of decline in enrollment in languages other than English in colleges and universities, the global COVID pandemic created additional challenges for higher education and for language programs, among the most recent of which has been the elimination of foreign language degree programs and most language courses at West Virginia University (WVU).

The fact that such an unprecedented action took place at a state public flagship institution not only impacts local students and faculty, but also has the potential to further disrupt language learning in colleges and universities and beyond (Aiken, 2023; Kingson, 2023). Advocacy is needed now more than ever in order to strengthen language programs, to defend those that are in danger, and to encourage expansion of existing programs and the development of new ones.

In order to be effective, advocacy must be grounded in our belief in the importance of multilingualism both globally and locally, and informed by relevant data. Key elements of advocacy include partnerships among language educators and interdisciplinary partnerships, as well as K-16 and community partnerships. Successful initiatives have included double majors, and joint and interdisciplinary programs. Technology also plays a key role in increasing accessibility and availability of language learning through the development of online courses and Open Educational Resources (OERs), offering practical and affordable options for all our students. The current national context for language advocacy and for French language advocacy includes therefore both serious challenges to language learning and use in the US, but also many organizations and initiatives, educators and language advocates, and language stakeholders in our educational institutions and communities.

It is critically important at a time when the unprecedented elimination of the foreign language and other programs – if successful – at WVU may well serve as encouragement for other institutions to implement similar actions against programs in languages and literatures as well as in other programs in the humanities and beyond, for language educators and stakeholders to stand together and to speak out (Aiken, 2023; Simpson, 2023).

The authors will discuss the theory and best practices of advocacy, which include the psychology of persuasion, blue ocean strategy, disruptive innovation, public relations, social marketing, and social movements. They will also discuss the use of technology in advocacy as well as the role of lobbying, petitions, etc. In addition, authors will also provide an

* West Virginia University, where foreign language majors and many foreign language courses were eliminated in 2023.

¹ This article is inspired by a panel presented by the authors at the 2024 MLA Convention in Philadelphia.

overview of advocacy challenges and successes, as well as success stories and strategies for success. The authors bring a breadth and depth of experience to the conversation on advocacy, which they hope to share. In addition, their goal is to encourage questions, interactions, and discussions in order to encourage present and future collaborations in advocacy and beyond. The following sections illustrate just a few of the many perspectives on French language learning, use, and advocacy, with a special focus on the college and university level.

II. LESSONS IN LANGUAGE STUDIES: GEN Z, CAREER READINESS, CREATING THE BA, CURRICULAR DESIGN, AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Aligning with the advocacy mission and vision of the Joint National Committee for Languages-National Council for Languages and International Studies, language educators are seeking interdisciplinary intersections to highlight how multilingualism moves our world and that languages are a valuable skill in any profession. Montclair State University in northern New Jersey has recently added a B.A. in Language, Business & Culture (LBC) to complement its offerings in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. The degree, a joint program between the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Feliciano School of Business, enriches the traditional narratives of language programs and advocates for new directions in teaching and student success through integrative education in language and business, emphasizing the centrality of cultural and linguistic competency to the business world. LBC's innovative approach not only prepares students for success in today's globalized marketplace but also expands traditional language pathways and emphasizes practical applications of language proficiency in diverse professional settings.

A. *Seizing Opportunities and Responding to Industry Demands*

Adding LBC to the Montclair curriculum was an obvious choice: the University's unwavering commitment to students, its designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), and its location are all favorable to the major's success. First, there is no other public university in the State that offers an interdisciplinary degree in language and business. Second, as an HSI, students who identify as Hispanic can hone their intercultural communicative competence for the workplace. Spanish is only one of the over 100 languages spoken in NJ homes, according to 2022 census data, so it presents a fertile ground for language study. Finally, New Jersey's ecosystem offers significant opportunities for LBC majors as it is a hub for international business, home to the headquarters of over 200 foreign companies. Case in point, a review of the 2023 Economic Report of the French Embassy underlines the French footprint in New Jersey, and its "deep and mutually beneficial relationship" (Embassy, 2023, p. 38). Supporting data indicates that France ranks #1 in the State for job creation, with French firms accounting for 14.4% of jobs created by foreign companies, for a total of 41,400 jobs.

Connecting majors to this vibrant local network spanning different industries and sharing common business interests will strongly appeal to contemporary students, Gen Zers, who perceive education to be more transactional and less transformative (Katz et al., 2021). If they are simply learning to get a job, students will regard a major in Language, Business & Culture as instrumental to career readiness. Montclair's target students are those who have strengths in a target language and are interested in pursuing an interdisciplinary degree. What's more, they will easily distinguish themselves as prospective candidates for jobs compared to the over 350,000 U.S. students who graduate annually with just a business degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Rooted in recognizing the evolving needs of today's workforce, as reported by ACTFL (2019), employers' demands for employees with foreign language skills will only continue to increase both domestically and internationally due to the evolving conditions of the U.S. marketplace. LBC responds to the industry demands.

B. *Designing (and Redesigning) a Dynamic Curriculum*

Language, Business & Culture was shaped by faculty in two language departments in the College of Humanities and numerous programs in the School of Business and comprised of a series of core courses (fundamental business courses and the target language business course) and a concentration in one of seven languages and conclude with an international experience and a capstone. Foreign language skills are honed through applied language classes ranging from business to professional-related fields. Students develop the skills that employers seek, including intercultural competence, writing skills, oral and business communication, critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, and the knowledge base of international business, accounting, economics, finance, and technology. Badges representing technical skills are earned in their first-year spreadsheet course (the MS Excel Expert certification exam) and their senior year, with the Oral Proficiency Interview.

Prior to graduation, there is a required international experience for all majors, which serves as a prerequisite for the capstone course. This experiential learning opportunity encompasses a range of options, including studying abroad, participating in an international internship (either abroad or with an international company in the US), or a faculty-led short-term trip abroad. Montclair also offers courses with collaborative online courses with some frequency and has developed a relationship with the University of Bordeaux Montaigne for translation (Loysen et al., 2023), and Business English, which is currently ongoing. The expectation of the international experience is to activate diverse forms of knowledge within a practical context, facilitating direct engagement with the cultural products, perspectives, and practices connected to their target language in academic or professional environments.

The capstone course was developed especially for the major and is a meeting point for seniors across all seven language tracks. Through critical assessment and focused reflection, students compare and contrast linguistic and cultural gaps identified in their international experience and navigate these cross-cultural interactions. They gain insights into strategies to address the interactions and develop the necessary tools to narrow the gaps in multilingual and multicultural negotiations. After addressing the challenges, they apply the strategies and skills to a collaborative team project representative of real-world scenarios, in which their lived experiences extend to possible business situations. One student commented in the course evaluations: "I enjoyed taking this course very much as it brought about how to do business with different cultures. [...] Dr. Antenos challenged us intellectually and academically. I especially enjoyed working on our final project, where we were to take an American-made product and sell it to our target countries. [...]. The advertisements were something about this project that I did enjoy working on because we were able to use our language skills and make an ad that was creative while incorporating our language".

The major has enjoyed much success and has become a benchmark for similar interdisciplinary programs at other institutions. However, it is prudent for us to periodically assess and maintain checks and balances as the program grows. To this end, the LBC curriculum has been reviewed to streamline the program and enhance its coherence, informed by ACTFL's *Making Languages Our Business* report (2019). Core courses have been revisited and some business courses will be substituted to ensure students are prepared to meet the demands of U.S. employers. Additionally, a gateway course, *Introduction to Intercultural Business Communication*, was created to present the major more comprehensively earlier on in the curriculum. The course will equip students with the necessary insights, skills, concepts, and tools to understand the pivotal role of language and culture in business communications and actively engage in self-examination, addressing their own multilingual and multicultural identities.

C. Empowering Student Success

Unlike conventional language programs that may compartmentalize language learning from other academic disciplines, and business programs that compartmentalize business culture from language, LBC emphasizes the interconnectedness of language, business, and culture. By bridging these domains, the program equips students with a comprehensive skill set that extends beyond linguistic proficiency, empowering them to navigate complex global challenges with confidence and agility.

For instance, a recent major in the French concentration, now in the MBA program, fulfilled the international experience requirement by working as a virtual research assistant and dispatcher during the pandemic for the online French news outlet *Al-Ahram Hebdo*. The student's supervisor shared that the student "a également participé, avec moi et avec d'autres journalistes, à la rédaction de plusieurs articles, en faisant le travail de collecte des dépêches d'agences puis en effectuant un plan de travail." The teamwork and planning served her well when the following summer she had a *Sherwin-Williams Sales and Management* internship and her team won the *Outstanding Team Award* for the program.

Another major exemplifies the program's commitment to providing students with career readiness skills in which linguistic and cultural competence are indeed valued. Following her graduation, this major in the Italian concentration secured an internship position at *Ferrero USA*. Drawing on her language skills and cultural awareness, she became an asset to the company and was promoted. She wrote: "I wanted to reach out as we are looking for an individual to fill my spot here in workplace management. I am moving to [another department] and wanted you to assist in finding a replacement. I would love to recommend a fellow LBC student if you know of anyone who may be interested!" In this instance, LBC provides the skills students need to be offered positions at this multinational confectionery company and have upward mobility.

The interdisciplinary major *Language, Business & Culture* is making a difference for students who wish to pursue language study while forging innovative career trajectories. The success of LBC will not be measured solely by the number of majors but by the accomplishments of these majors as multilingual and multicultural business leaders.

III. ADVOCACY AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE 2024

While the study of World Languages has never been the highest priority in the United States as compared with most other countries, industrialized or developing, the post-covid period has seen a dramatic decline. Data from the *MLA Report* show a 16% drop in language study from 2016-2021. Colleges and Universities have seen the elimination of World Language Programs. As early as 2016-2017, 44 states and the District of Columbia reported a lack of qualified K-12 FL and bilingual teachers (US Dept. of Education). Added to this is a decline in the study of the humanities throughout the country. What does this imply for the future of World Language study? More importantly, what does it mean for the future of our society? How can we reverse the tide? We shall attempt to respond to these questions.

The knowledge of world languages and cultures is not an option for our society. It is essential for mutual understanding, social justice, and peaceful relationships among nations. The *Joint National Commission on Languages (JNCL)* has demonstrated that "Multilingual and multicultural perspectives are essential to our national security ... and to our national economy" (JNCL, n.d.). Language and culture are inseparable. Can we understand the perspective of another country if we do not know its culture and its values? Would the Vietnam War have persisted, or even occurred, if we had understood that nation and spoken their language? We will never eliminate all the obstacles to mutual understanding, but we can minimize them by expanding our knowledge of language and culture.

As advocates for the study of language and culture, we must find ways to stem the tide of monolingualism and cultural isolation. Administrators must learn the necessity and the value of these studies for all students, including minorities and socially disadvantaged members of our society. Students must see the same reasons for studying another language. The knowledge of another language and culture will show them another way of looking at the world. We need government help and parental support. Social Justice demands that all students have access to heritage languages.

There are many positive avenues available to teachers to foster the study of language and culture. Among them are the Seal of Biliteracy, Language across the Curriculum, collaborative majors and minors, and recognition of successful programs. Others may require more direct advocacy such as obtaining government aid, especially for minorities and disadvantaged students, subsidizing existing programs, and study abroad opportunities.

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award granted by a school, district, organization or state in the United States of America, "in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation" (ACTFL, n.d.) Thanks to the efforts of many language advocates, this designation is available in all 50 states. Usually, students receive it in high school, with a recommended level of Intermediate mid. However, the Global Seal of Biliteracy is available to anyone in higher education and beyond. As language advocates, we can publicize this option and invite students to pursue it.

Pennsylvania has a similar designation, which will further develop the cultural aspect of language learning. It is called PSMLA Global Scholars Program (PSMLA, 2024a). It includes four years of the same language, extracurricular activities related to world language study, service, and literature and media review. Any school can adapt it as appropriate, and need not introduce any new courses. It has grown rapidly in Pennsylvania, and can serve as a model for other states. Among other advantages, it will "develop global awareness/competency and help students to better prepare themselves for personal and professional success in an increasingly global society".

Language across the Curriculum gives students the opportunity to extend their language study beyond their language classes. They can integrate world language and culture into non-language courses through reading or research in the target language, followed by reports or presentations in the target or native language. This is a way for teachers to identify and encourage qualified students to continue their language study in a meaningful way. They can see practical applications in such courses as history, political science, and communications. It gives teachers an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, who in turn can appreciate the value of language study. It can help language majors or minors to add extra breadth or to complete requirements. Some successful examples include the interpretation of political cartoons in the target language, use of primary sources in a history class followed by a presentation or written report, or exploration of religious texts and poetry, such as Theresa of Avila.

Students are not always able nor do not wish to follow a traditional major with its emphasis on literature. They look for practical courses, which they feel will help them in their career. Double majors or collaborative majors can address these issues. For example, International Business, emphasizing proficiency in at least one world language along with courses for the business world can provide much better candidates than a major in only one of these fields. In addition, the collaboration between departments will cultivate mutual understanding. Other successful options can maintain the usual number of credits for a major, with the majority in the language, and the remaining in another field accompanied by Language across the Curriculum. Some examples are French plus diplomacy (with courses in Political Science), Spanish plus Human Services, Russian plus Criminal Justice.

Advocacy succeeds best when it emphasizes success. World Language associations can establish recognition awards for exemplary programs. These can be models for other schools, and help administrators defend their programs. The American Association of Teachers of French has honored over 70 schools since 2015 (AATF, 2024). Among the criteria are stable or increasing enrollment, teacher excellence and professional development, student activities, use of key instructional practices, innovative curriculum, connection to the community, and creative plans for the future. These schools have maintained and increased their programs. Pennsylvania has a similar program called the Pennsylvania Exemplary Program (PEP) Award, (PSMLA, 2024). It addresses all languages in all high schools. It too has encouraged teachers, students, and administrators to maintain and expand language and culture study.

The Commission on Language Learning, launched in 2015 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at the behest of eight members of Congress, has made similar recommendations (America's Languages, n.d.). The members represent academe, government, business, and NGO's. They continue their study of ways to expand the study of world languages. Their recommendations include identifying schools that teach specific languages in order to encourage well-articulated language sequences from elementary through middle and high school and continuing through college. They also propose identifying schools that may be interested in a relationship with a teacher training institution, such as sponsoring student teachers, mentoring undergraduates, or collaborating in other ways. Other recommendations include identifying schools that could serve as national model programs for their language taught and/or program design. Finally, they urge the exploration of student participation in government-sponsored extracurricular foreign language opportunities. They are especially attentive to the needs of minority and heritage learners.

Although we need more government support, a number of agencies offer subsidized programs. Among them is the Department of Education, which offers Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS) and Language Resource Centers. The Department of State offers many programs, among them the Critical Language Scholarships Program (CLS).

The Department of Defense sponsors the Language Flagship programs. Title VI and the Fulbright Program are other opportunities (America's Languages, n.d.a).

However, government funding is always dependent on the National Budget, which fluctuates according to political and economic conditions. It will always be necessary to advocate with the government agencies. JNCL is a guide and support in the promotion of world language and culture advocacy. Each year they offer a virtual advocacy day as they did in 2023 (JNCL, 2023). Their Newsletters contain the latest updates on government funding possibilities and engagement in advocacy (JNCL-NCLIS, n.d.).

While the future looks bleak, things can and have turned around. We can motivate our students, and show them the benefits of language and culture study. We can show them better critical thinking skills through the study of world languages. Some other advantages are higher test scores, an asset in employment, and global awareness. We need to make advocates of our teachers and parents. Good teaching techniques will encourage students and make them successful. They in turn will interest others.

We need to advocate for more teachers, the preservation of existing programs, government and state funding, especially for minority schools and early/dual language learning. We must join forces with other disciplines through collaborative programs and Language across the curriculum. It is important to be creative, to propose programs that will bring both language competency and practical applications to our students. We must increase visibility, and highlight student and program successes. Finally, we must be the very best teachers we can be, because the most successful way to advocate is through interpersonal relations and mutual understanding.

IV. FOREIGN TO LANGUAGE: NOTES ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION ADVOCACY IN 21ST- CENTURY HIGHER EDUCATION

In the aftermath of the pandemic and the elimination of language programs at West Virginia University, advocating for world language studies in higher education is proving both more urgent and more challenging than ever. With the exception of Korean, Biblical Hebrew, and American Sign Language, most language programs saw their enrolments decline dramatically during the pandemic, after a decade of already dwindling numbers (MLA, 2021; MLA, 2023). Often confronted with tremendous budgetary pressures, language programs have been scrambling to respond to this daunting crisis. Sweeping curricular measures are being introduced with the hope of meeting the challenge of relevance in an academic context marked by the erosion of the traditional Humanities and rapidly changing student demographics with evolving needs and interests.

Forcibly aligned with the strategic planning of their schools or colleges, these curricular strategies are primarily developed to remedy levels of enrollment judged unsustainable, at the expense of any in-depth consideration of the mission and nature of the discipline. Increasing numbers of language programs now promote language learning with the promise of providing students with global citizenship skills and meeting their professional aspirations while ensuring on-time graduation. Hence the widespread development of courses, certificates, Minors and Majors in languages for the professions, including business, health care, tourism, translation, teaching, and international affairs. Language programs today know that they must integrate readiness for professional careers in the global world into their mission statement in order to thrive. In departments like the Rutgers-NB French Department, which I'm chairing, French Commerce stands as the one upper-level course taught in French that is consistently well-enrolled and attracts both non-majors and majors. The need to realign language studies with students' professional interests has not gone unnoticed outside of the US. The French Government, for instance, has become increasingly concerned with the rapidly declining interest in the national language in the US, both in K-12 and higher education institutions. It recently launched, through the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, a program of partnerships and grants designed to incentivize the integration of courses and programs in French for the professions into the language curricula of colleges across the US.

Another common curricular shift is the turn to teaching advanced content courses in English in an effort to attract non-minors and non-majors to language departments. Most European language faculty have by now become accustomed to teaching literature, culture, or film courses in English that were once taught in French, Italian, German, or Russian. At the same time, language programs are revamping their majors to make it possible to major in four years with no prior knowledge of the target language by lowering proficiency requirements to the intermediate level. As a consequence, language proficiency at the advanced level is plummeting, and it has become increasingly challenging –if not impossible– for most students to do well in upper-level content courses taught in the target language. Understandably, few students currently opt for language-intensive majors, knowing that they won't reach the language proficiency they would need to succeed. Instead, most chose to pursue Majors in "Interdisciplinary language studies," allowing them to do the largest part of their coursework in English.

While there is no question that student access ought to be an absolute priority of all public institutions of higher learning, facilitating access is a particularly fraught—and in the present context perhaps inextricable—issue when it comes to language education. Enhancing student access to language learning by offering Minors and Majors with reduced language requirements and mostly taught in English inevitably jeopardizes our ability to offer actual language education. This is if by language education, we mean learning to understand, speak, and write in languages other than English at a level of proficiency enabling the study of world cultures in their own words. The reality today is such that very few language departments can still afford to make good on that promise, and those who still do must continually fight for the survival of under-enrolled advanced courses in their language-intensive tracks.

When we add to the mix that most programs now resort to teaching their introductory and intermediate language courses in asynchronous-remote delivery mode (AR) in order to survive, the picture of learning outcomes in terms of actual language proficiency looks very grim. To be sure, AR or even hybrid language courses are tremendously effective in boosting enrollments because they allow students in all kinds of majors to fit language courses into their schedule. But the hard truth is that these courses are completely ineffective when it comes to reaching language proficiency. Furthermore, those courses, which are designed to serve a population of non-traditional students, are taken by “traditional” undergraduates who are counting on them to raise their GPA thanks to the near impossible task of enforcing academic integrity in the AR setting. Whether we want to admit it or not, learning to speak a language in an academic context cannot be done successfully without an actual classroom anymore than learning to act can be done without an audience. We will come back to the performance analogy later. The point here is to draw attention to the limits and consequences of the widespread curricular shifts we have made in the past decade to promote language education among students and advocate for its survival with the university leadership.

How, then, can we advocate more compellingly for language learning in higher education? It is necessary to make clear that this is not an argument for a return to the traditional and more elitist model of language studies where acquiring knowledge of a world culture required securing prior mastery of its language. It goes without saying that the interests and professional needs of 21st-century college students must drive our pedagogical mission and strategic goals. But this should happen in tandem with advocating for the means allowing us to continue to also offer exciting opportunities to study world cultures at an advanced level in the languages in which they are produced. In other words, it is important to argue emphatically that catering to pragmatic goals must not be undertaken at the expense of catering to those students who aspire to an education in world languages per se but might be deterred from doing so by our own defection.

At Rutgers, most students who take two semesters of introductory French courses do not continue to the intermediate level primarily for want of both scheduling options and engagement with real instructors in real time and in real classrooms. Senior seminars in literature and culture taught in French are becoming extinct in the current financial climate. Furthermore, few students have the means to study abroad in semester or year-long programs. It is not an exaggeration to say that, currently, only a very small minority of non-heritage speakers who graduate with a Major in French is equipped with a level of proficiency adequate to navigate the professional, intellectual, and creative cultures of the global Francophone world. If we don't set higher goals for 21st-century world language education—in other words if we don't advocate for the means to offer audacious small-classroom programs to teach global cultures in their own words—not only do we risk failing our best students but soon we'll also find ourselves in the paradoxical position of advocating for world language learning in English only.

In 2023, Rutgers launched the Year of Languages, an innovative initiative designed to celebrate, promote, and advocate for language studies on a campuswide scale. Spearheaded by Rutgers-NB SAS Dean of Humanities Rebecca Walkowitz and organized by the language departments and programs of the School of Arts and Sciences, this year-long series of events featured essay and video contests where students were invited to share the reasons why they chose to learn languages. It was quite striking to see, among dozens of submissions, that while students predictably stated that they learn languages to communicate with non-English speakers in professional, social, or personal settings, they also expressed more ambitious aspirations. Their essays captured the excitement of confronting the irreducible thickness of foreign² languages which, as they learn in our classrooms, filters all deep encounters with cultural diversity. Ezra Campos-Pereira, one winner of the essay contest who majored in Finance and French, explained that “I learn languages because otherwise, I'll never know the music of the untranslatable.” Andi Craciun, another essay contest winner majoring in Visual Arts and Philosophy with a Spanish minor, recounted that “to [her], learning another language ... has never been solely about learning how to communicate.... Spanish has brought [her] closer to understanding [herself].” Another winning essay written by Luis Sanchez-Gonzalez, a linguistics and biological sciences major learning Italian, Japanese, German, French, and Mandarin, argues quite eloquently that “language in education is presented as a means to worldliness but its value varies from one person to the next. To some it is the ability to see the world, and to others, a pursuit of knowledge. We often overlook, however, that to others still, it is the opportunity for a better life, leaving home.” The authors submit that this experience of “leaving home”, when taken in the many senses of the word, is fundamental to language studies. It is precisely what we teach in our language classrooms: namely, leaving that native part of our speaking selves behind; becoming someone else by learning to perform in languages that are not our own as well as those that do not entirely feel like our own even if we were born into them.

It seems to me that we owe it to our students to advocate for language education in ways that are as audacious as are their goals and aspirations when they consider studying a language. What captivates students in our language classrooms is as much the experience of confronting the incommunicable foreignness of the languages they learn as their ability to start communicating in them. Therefore, we shouldn't be shy about arguing for the means to provide them with both the language communication skills they need and the opportunity for the self-transforming experience to which they aspire of being granted access to the vast expanse of the languages of others, including those other than English they already speak. Large public institutions like Rutgers, whose mission statements typically promise a transformative education

² The term “foreign” is used purposely to designate the fundamental otherness of a language in which one did not grow up and whose mastery is quite difficult to achieve. This connotation gets lost when we prefer qualifiers like “word language”, “additional language”, “a language other than our own”, etc.

preparing for the world stage,³ ought to be taken at their word. As language education advocates, we should strengthen our resolve to rescue and expand—rather than shrink—such programs in what we might call transformative language learning by arguing for them on ethical as well as practical grounds.

Transformative language learning is hard and humbling work. It is about transitioning into linguistic identities shaped by the cognitive and embodied grammars of life in tongues other than English. It is done through imitation and repetition without any guaranty of mastery. As a simultaneously intellectual, technical, and experiential pursuit, it takes language education to the point where it meets performance studies. As any language instructor knows, effective language acquisition is quintessentially mimetic, immersive, and performative. It happens in the physical body of the learners—their voice, gestures, posture, and movements—through persistent and often tedious repetitions and rehearsals.

Therefore, we should no longer accept that language education be reduced to mere interaction with dematerialized language structures on virtual learning platforms. In fact, promoting language studies in higher education compellingly may rest on developing interdisciplinary curricula, in partnership with Performance Studies programs, which cultivate performative relationships with the languages to which we are foreign. Just like actors learn to voice and embody the words they perform, to be a language learner is to grapple with that material aspect of languages, including one's own, that resists translation and only makes sense when it is inhabited.

There is much to gain from presenting language studies as a discipline that teaches students to engage, in embodied encounters, with the foreignness of language, whether it be a foreign, literary or a creative language, a stylistic register, a sociolect, a scientific or a professional idiom. By educating students in the arts and ethics of being foreign to language—foreign, therefore, to both oneself and others, we build upon what we, in language programs, already do and are uniquely equipped to provide: an education in 21st-century global humanism. This, it seems to me, is a cause well worth fighting for.

V. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE ADVOCACY IN THE US: PERSPECTIVES FROM FRENCH

We live in a multilingual world, where half the global population uses more than one language, and only 25% of the world population speaks English (Grosjean, 2010, 2020; British Council, 2013). “Language education, and the accompanying linguistic and intercultural competencies, are a necessity for social, political and economic development, and for effective collaboration” (AMACAD, 2020, p. 1).

In addition, the linguistic context in the United States is framed by both our history and by the rise in the number of speakers of languages other than English in the home, which stands at almost 70M and has increased over 50% since 2000. Those who speak French in the home in the US currently number over 2M, and this number includes “Cajun, Patois, Creole, Haitian,” reflecting the global nature of the French-speaking world and of those who speak French in the US, as well as the significant increase in French-speakers in recent years (over 35% since 1980) (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022, p. 3). French is also the second most studied language in the world and in the US, with 1.3M enrolled at the K-12 level and 135K at the college and university level (American Councils, 2017; MLA, 2023).

Advocacy has been defined as “persuading people who matter to care about your issue,” and includes “getting listened to,” as well as speaking and writing” (Daly, 2011, p. 15). Beyond this general description, advocacy has a political dimension as a social movement and can be considered a social movement, among “small groups that are loosely connected but united by a shared purpose that have created transformational changes (Satell & Popovic, 2017, p. 1). In empowering language advocates to engage in “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal,” advocacy is also a possibility for language educators to develop their leadership skills (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).

French language advocacy has been described in terms of *francoresponsabilité*, a term which originated in Quebec, and which has been described as “développer l’usage de la langue française au quotidien” and of *franco-activisme* (France-Amérique, 2019, p. 1; Ambassade, 2023). At the global and international level, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), Alliance Française, and a number of French government related programs play a leading role. In the United States, many organizations are involved in language advocacy and in French language advocacy, including organizations of language educators such as the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the Joint Committee for Languages – National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL, n.d.; JNCL, 2023), and the Modern Language Association (MLA) at the national and international level, along with regional, state, and local organizations and groups. In addition, a number of organizations of different types, including the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), the Franco-American Centre (FACNH), and the Nous Foundation play a role, along with regional and local social media initiatives across the country like the French-Canadian Legacy Podcast, French Maine USA, Récits Francophones au Coeur de l’Amérique, and community initiatives like the NH PoutineFest.

It is important to consider the nature of advocacy, whether it is “everyday” advocacy, intended to support French language learning and use within the context of a multilingual United States and a global world, or whether it is “emergency” advocacy, intended to support and defend a program that is at risk or in danger (Peckham & Stein-Smith, 2021).

³ The Rutgers' motto is "Jersey Roots, Global Reach".

It is also useful to consider advocacy from a variety of perspectives, including the roles of organizations and the importance of the individual, as advocacy can occur in a variety of circumstances ranging from global and national initiatives to the work of dedicated language educators in the classroom, in their institutions, and in their communities. It is also necessary to consider the environments where advocacy may take place – through organizational activity, personal interactions and social media, as well as through research, writing, and speaking, among others.

Advocacy is both a challenge and an opportunity. While the addition of yet another activity to the schedule of an already busy language educator may initially seem difficult, and the term may seem somewhat abstract at first, advocacy begins in the classroom through our teaching and can take place during a conversation with a local parent or institutional decision-maker. Beyond the classroom, whether onsite or online, advocacy is an opportunity for each language educator or stakeholder to engage in encouraging and strengthening language learning and use as an individual, bringing to advocacy their own interests and strengths, and using a wide variety of strategies and methods ranging from psychology of persuasion and blue ocean thinking, to social media, and to lobbying and political action.

VI. CONCLUSIONS – CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The advantages of multilingualism for the individual and for society are well known, and range from personal and professional benefits for the individual to better understanding and appreciation of other cultures both globally and locally. “The future in America, and everywhere, is multilingual. And so is the present” (Montlaur, 2019). Challenges that remain include the opportunity, affordability and accessibility of language learning, and these are being addressed through the development of more affordable and flexible online courses and educational materials (OERs), through the development of professional and other specialized language programs at the college and university level, and through the growth in immersion programs. The good news is that language educators, in collaboration and partnership with educators and language stakeholders, including prospective employers and – most importantly – parents and communities, are working together to encourage learning of both heritage and world languages and to strengthen and encourage the use of additional languages in the workplace and in society.

Current and future advocacy priorities include building awareness of the benefits of language skills. Expanding opportunity for language learning, through development of additional programs, especially at the elementary level where only 15% of public elementary schools offer languages is an advocacy priority (AMACAD, 2017). Affordability is another challenge, where the cost of a language course and the required materials may prevent students from enrolling in an extra, after-school, or other course. Cost also includes the opportunity cost of beginning or continuing a language due to scheduling, curriculum, or other issues. Accessibility, which includes the needs of non-traditional learners as well as those with learning and other disabilities, requires both accessible materials and flexible online learning.

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