

ACTFL 2016, Boston, Massachusetts

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The ACTFL ((American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages))Annual Convention and World Languages Expo in Boston provided comprehensive professional development delivering a major impact on and benefits for the attendees, 7,000 + language educators at all levels of teaching from pre-K-12 and beyond. ACTFL's stated goals are to assist educators to inspire their students to take a more active role in their own language learning. One of the most important impressions I took away from this ACTFL Annual Convention was the strong commitment of so many educators to quality language teaching in all languages from pre-K to adult learners. Along with this positive and upbeat theme I also noted deep concerns among the leaders in language pedagogy and language acquisition about the state of language education in this country. Declining enrollments, reduced funding, and fewer trained language teachers are a significant problem for the United States as a major player on the world stage.

Highlights:

The Opening General Session featured a keynote address by author, innovator, and futurist Mike Walsh on "The Language Factor: Impacting the Future." the video of his talk is available only to registered ACTFL members, but a similar talk "Forget Millennials, worry about 8 year olds": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Tqd7N-hg-Q> (4 minute clip) gives the general flavor of his presentation.

More than 800 sessions focused on innovative programs, research-informed practices, and emerging trends in the language profession. The World Languages Expo, featured more than 250 exhibitors and included more than 60 exhibitor workshops showcasing new materials and methods relevant to enhanced language instruction on all levels.

Additionally, the meeting included full and half-day pre-convention workshops, special ACTFL plenary sessions, a career café, social media lounge, hands-on "collab zones" (Interactive

opportunity to learn more about ACTFL assessment tools in an informal environment.) This is the premier meeting of the year and affords ACTFL members the opportunity to network with colleagues, learn about innovations in language instruction and technology, and present their own research to their peers.

AAUSC

The AAUSC (American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators, and Directors of Language Programs) <http://www.aausc.org/> meeting was held in conjunction with the ACTFL Convention. I was elected this year as the Arabic section head of the AAUSC. My colleagues and I discussed many issues concerning programs in many languages at universities across the country, and these are all issues which are relevant to us in NELC. I will note a few of the highlights of the many ACTFL panels and meetings I attended over the three days.

Vital Topics

Many speakers noted the growing demand for a language-competent global work force and its deployment into the workplace. America lags behind the rest of the world in producing competent multilingual workers. ACTFL and its membership not only provide most of the language teaching professionals, they also advocate for language instruction at local, state, and national levels.

Colleagues from other universities and colleges mentioned the need for departmental advocacy, and how we as language educators should work with the administration, and participate in developing a departmental vision to promote a successful slate of language courses.

On a national note, the US Congress commissioned the first national study on language learning, and it was released by the American Academy for the Arts and Sciences in late 2016. This study is an in-depth look at where we stand as a nation in building our language capabilities. It also offers some specific guidelines and measures for improving language learning in the USA. The study calls for greater emphasis on teaching American students world languages, and creating a cadre of linguistically competent citizens to fill roles in government, diplomacy, education, trade,

and other international spheres. This “statistical portrait” of the state of languages in the US: <https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/publication.aspx?d=22429> provides a look at recent data on the status and role of languages in the US and asks some telling questions which require further research to answer. The question below is particularly relevant to our mission here at the University of Washington.

How does a lack of language requirements, both at the K–12 and the university/college level, impact language acquisition in the United States? (p. 20).

Advocacy for teaching of foreign languages from K-16 was a major topic of interest and was the subject for discussion with several panels led by major figures in the field. There is more than a little concern among many of these individuals and the programs and groups they represent about the incoming administration, whose attitude towards education and international relations isn't yet clear.

On a related note, the future of grants and government-sponsored programs that are essential to language teaching and learning is concerning. The demand for available and competent language instruction from K to 16 is real, and growing, but the supply of teachers and programs is diminishing, and no one is sure what the new government will do about this issue.

A major panel on the numbers and statistics for language programs and enrollments show a general downturn in enrollment. In Arabic for example, undergraduate enrollment is up and graduate enrollment is down. Newly established Arabic programs seems to be doing better than many of the older, more established programs across the country. The 2013 report https://www.mla.org/content/download/31180/1452509/EMB_enrllmnts_nonEngl_2013.pdf provides data on current (as of 2013) enrollment in languages other than English and Arabic ranks 7th, after Spanish, French, ASL, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese. Arabic had about 33,000 students enrolled. Only Korean, ASL, Portuguese, and Chinese registered gains in enrollment since the previous survey in 2009. Farsi and Modern Hebrew have decreased enrollments, while Turkish shows modest gains.

There is considerable growth in K-12 programs and Arabic language programs for this demographic were strongly represented in the ACTFL program with more panels than I could

possibly attend. Overall it was a mostly encouraging and refreshing look at the state of American foreign language instruction and it left me with hope for the future

The Future

Several speakers expressed varying degrees of optimism concerning the future of foreign language education in the US. Among them I note:

Ed McDermott (Senior program manager for The Language Flagship program) .said that the existing groups and organizations active in language learning knew how to deal with Democrats and with Republicans, but are not sure how to deal with a Trump government.

<https://thelanguageflagship.org/content/meet-flagship-team>

William P. Rivers (Executive director of the Joint National Committee on Language and the National Council for Language and International Studies) mentioned that they have already been in touch with the transition team to ensure that the importance of quality language programs that are essential to the United States is well known to the new administration.

<http://www.languagepolicy.org/>

Richard Brecht (Executive Director of the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) is of the opinion that the campaign rhetoric that often seemed negative vis-à-vis foreigners will not adversely affect the national mandate to provide quality foreign language instruction from K to 16 in the United States.

<https://www.casl.umd.edu/people/richard-d-brecht/>

American Councils for International Education presents an interesting commentary (2015) on why NOW is the time to study Arabic, noting that the demand for speakers continues to soar.

<https://www.americancouncils.org/categories/language-news>.

Annenberg Learner

This site provides free teacher resources and professional development across the curriculum. <http://www.learner.org/resources/browse.html?discipline=3&grade=0>. This video library captures best practices in foreign language teaching in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms across the U.S. The languages featured in the collection are: [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Italian](#), [Japanese](#), [Latin](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#). Because of the expert video analyses presented in English, teachers of languages not yet included in these libraries can still benefit from the best practices demonstrated. <http://www.learner.org/libraries/tfl/>

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